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THE GIRL FROM KURDISTAN

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LIMITED LONDON

MISS HAROUN AL-RASCHID

BY
JESSIE DOUGLAS KERRUISH

*The First Prize in Hodder and Stoughton's
One Thousand Guineas Novel Competition*

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LIMITED LONDON

*Printed in Great Britain by Hazell, Watson & Viney, Ltd.,
London and Aylesbury.*

PR
6021
K468m

TO
THE MEMORY OF
MARGARET DUNCAN KERRUISH
AND
MOSES HENRY KERRUISH
MY MOTHER AND FATHER

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BOOK I

*ROUND ABOUT ROUM AND
FRANKISTAN*

Chapter I

CONCERNING ASSYRIOLOGY AND RATHIA KHAN

THE primordial blame rests on Papa. Filial respect is ingrained in the Oriental half of my composition, yet I state distinctly that all the trouble may be traced to his blunder of Moharrem 189—.

It was purely blunder. Papa cannot help doing foolish things; he is a genius: and genius consists of the possession of boundless talent, patience *ad lib.*, initiative, energy, and no commonsense whatever. Men with genius are hard to live with, women with it are not fit to live with.

My father's genius is undeniable. It takes something beyond talent of the first water to make a man acknowledged King of Assyriology after those mighty successive monarchs of the science—Sir Henry Rawlinson, Sir Austen Layard, and Hormuzd Rassam.

But half the world does not know how the other fraction lives and does its business. I have met graduates of Yale and Oxford who were unacquainted with the fact that the Pitcairn Islanders earn a modest subsistence by taking in one another's washing, and early in the very day that was to see the arrival of the Messageries Maritimes steamer with Papa and his blunder on board, a really intelligent elderly lady from the British Embassy happened to call on me and asked point-blank what Assyriology means.

"I confess I never could understand your father's profession, Miss Jerningham," she said apologetically.

I elucidated. A working Assyriologist is a person who digs in Asiatic Turkey for wrecked and buried towns of ancient Assyria and Babylonia. The two countries occupied the land that is now known as Mesopotamia—the Land Between the Rivers—Euphrates and Tigris, and the regions round about and southward. Thousands of years ago these towns and their temples were sacked and partly burnt and wholly deserted, the sun-dried bricks of which they were mainly built dissolved—in the wet of successive winters—into their original stage of mud, which ran down and embedded the marble sculptures of the palaces and temples, and other solid objects left behind by looters.

"Like raisins in a cake," suggested Mrs. Kent, as I paused.

"Precisely," I agreed, and went on to explain how sand blown by the winds of long ages accumulated on the ruins, and grass and flowers grew over, until, now, it takes the trained eye of an Assyriologist to tell whether the mound on which the Arab peasant draws his plough and sets up his village cemetery is a natural hillock or a grave wherein the ruins of Rehoboth-Ia may be embedded. The Old Testament puts the process in a line: "To make a heap of a fenced city."

"They are simply heaps," I proceeded. "It is a sheer gamble to dig into one unless there is a bit of ruin above the surface. You may find art and antiquarian treasures enough to put a Jew's ransom to the blush, or else waste your Fund's money for weeks before making sure the place is a natural hill."

"Your Fund?" repeated the visitor.

"Papa is the Field-director of the Oxford University Assyrian Exploration Fund."

"Oh, I see. He hires people to dig, and the anti-

quities he finds go to the Oxford Museum, don't they?"

"Alas, no! In the golden days of Layard and Botta, Place and Rassam, it was a case of finding is keeping for the excavator or his employers; but of late—unluckily for people of our trade—the Turkish Government has wakened to the folly of giving away its art treasures free gratis. It is now forbidden to export antiques out of the Empire; excavators are sometimes granted permits to dig, but may keep only a third of their finds. The Imperial Ottoman Museum takes the rest, if the discovery was on Crown land, with a portion for the landlord if it was private ground."

"It's a kind of 'The owl, for a boon, was kindly permitted to pocket the spoon' arrangement," said Mrs. Kent. Like most missionaries, she is flippant when not shoppy.

"It's all right," I rejoined. "Antiquarians can study the things in the Stamboul Museum. Papa gets the sport and kudos of the work, and I get the fun of helping him."

"Is it fun?" asked the visitor dubiously.

"Just listen, Mrs. Kent! Here's somebody wanting to know if life in my country of the Two Rivers is fun! I rather envy you, Mrs. Jocelyn; you have yet to see a Mesopotamian sunset for the first time. You know, Mrs. Kent, a tremendous hush—sky and land and river bathed in floods of amber light—the sun's disk: all throbbing orange, swelling in size as it nears the horizon, then hanging all a-quiver on the verge for a moment before it plunges out of sight."

"It makes you gasp like when your umbrella drips unexpectedly down the back of your neck," the missionary nodded appreciatively.

"And summer down-river, when a lizard, if it is donkey enough to try and cross the road at noon will be

burnt dead and roasted to a cinder half-way across——
But we are boring you, Mrs. Jocelyn."

"Not at all, I assure you. You live at Mosul, don't you?"

"It is our official headquarters, but we lead a roving life. When we work in Assyria, the dry desert and hill country, we camp out, but in Babylonia it is not feasible. Last year, at Tel Bairakhdar, south of Baghdad and ten miles from anywhere, we built a meftul (that means, literally, a fort, and practically an overgrown mud hut), and lived there in feudal state for months. We take our own overseers and a gang of trained men with us, and hire general labour on the spot. But there's no dulness with Turkish rustic navvies. They sometimes throw down their picks and baskets and go on strike with statues half dug out; they treat themselves to impromptu holidays for the purpose of going to drub rival villages or getting drubbed themselves; and once, at least, some Arabs for whom we could not find work raided the camp and tried to burn us up in it!"

"What a life for a lady!" exclaimed our visitor. "I wonder Sir Horne permits you to accompany him."

"He can't help himself. I insist on going. And it's My Land, you know: my mother was a native of Upper Assyria."

"Ye-es, I think I have heard some mention of it," murmured Mrs. Jocelyn, looking a little embarrassed.

I knew she was taking a covert peep at my nails, and I did not mind. Europeans say behind my back I have a touch of the tar-brush. The statement is strictly inaccurate, but I never bother to challenge it. You cannot convince some people that there are gradua-tions between the fair Celt and the Tierra del Fuegian.

"Rathia's mother was a charming woman," said Mrs. Kent kindly.

"So you knew the late Lady Jerningham?"

"Mrs. Jerningham," the missionary corrected. "No, I never saw her personally, but people who knew her have plenty to say of her—amongst other items that Rathia is an exact replica of her."

Mrs. Jocelyn took a sidelong look at me. It was not the first time she had indulged in an inspection of my appearance, but I knew that for once she was making an inventory of my physical details, not of my frock and furbelows.

Likewise, I knew the survey would inform her that the late Mrs. Jerningham was, in Mosulese memory, slightly under six feet in height, that she owned Hellenic features—the nose and brow all in one line, like the forepart of a Bayeux tapestry helmet—a skin that would have been accounted light in Italy, lurid red-brown eyes, and hair of a lively wall-flower tint with a single albino lock sweeping up flamboyantly over one temple.

My mother was one of the last of the race of hereditary Pashas of Amadiyeh. Amadiyeh is in Kurdistan, north of Mosul, and its lords were of Abbasside descent, tracing it to the uncle of Muhammad, via the Khalifs of Baghdad and Samarra. On a time they were great seigniors. Their power was broken in the first half of the nineteenth century; the castle of Amadiyeh was reduced by a Turkish general, and when Papa first came to the Orient their remaining descendants were living in genteel poverty in Mosul.

Still, rich or poor, they were *crème de la crème* of the Nearer East, and my mother-to-be was Rathia Khan—which is as though one could with accuracy say, "the Lord Anne," or "Sir Elizabeth," the ladies of the Amadiyeh line being legally entitled—for the highness of their descent's sake—to the masculine title.

Rathia Khan, then, lived with her nearest kin, a

maternal aunt and her husband, in a little house on the virgin mound of Nebbi Younus, over the river hard against Mosul. This mound covers an important part of buried Nineveh, but it has never been excavated officially, because the tomb of Nebbi Younus—Prophet Jonah—is situate upon it and makes it holy ground. Still, for love of money, some of the householders on it can be induced to let an artful Assyriologist dig, *sub rosa*, and by night, in their land. Rathia Khan's guardians allowed Papa to work in a secluded corner of their court. Moslems of Kurdistan are not so pruriently punctilious about secluding their womenfolk as town-folk are: doubtless Rathia Khan found it a pleasant break in the monotony of life to slip out in the moonlight and peer down the mysterious hole as it deepened night by night. My father is still handsome, he was young then—one can see how it was bound to end. Either in broken hearts and streaming eyes, or—as it ended. A court, high-walled, moonlit, and topped by the solemn, slow-moving pageant of the stars, a black shaft with the eerie noise of men working at the bottom, a comely young man eager to explain each find as it was handed out, a lovely girl as eager to learn the explanation as she helped to pack the treasures with her slim Abbasside fingers. The storks peeping down—highly scandalised—from the roof, uncle or aunt dozing on the verandah in rôle of discreet gooseberry, the song of lapping river and rustling young leaves dallying with the spring night-breeze, the scent of the distant, wormwood-grown desert coming in subtle gusts to blend with the nearer, maddeningly subtle savour of the jasmine on the walls.

It is all easy to reconstruct.

The work lasted a month. Early in the next one Papa went exploring up north, with only two old servants for escort. A week later Rathia Khan took it

into her head to visit some far relations in a village up Hakkari way. A moon or so later her uncle and aunt went about for three days in unwashed garments with the seams carefully unpicked for a few inches at the hem in token of mourning, and were garrulously anxious to tell every one how their poor niece had met her death and burial far from home.

In the year's ending Papa came back with a wife. She was a Chaldaean: an orphan whose relatives had been wiped out in a Kurdish raid. Her exact lineage and original home could never be satisfactorily ascertained: she said herself that they were too humble to be mentioned now that she was the wife of a great Effendi. They had been married by H.M. Consul at Moush, that was certain, and Papa explained that the Anglican and Chaldaean Churches are so entirely in accord in matters of doctrine that the question was indifferent. Mosul coughed the Cough of Incredulity behind the Hand of Politeness; it could not help noticing that the new Mrs. Jerningham was wont to stop involuntarily and check herself in the act of passing her forefingers over her ears when the "Allahu Akhbar . . ." rolled from the minarets at Salat times.

It was everybody's secret: nobody was taken in, and nobody whispered a suspicion aloud. The local Ulema looked at it like men of the world.

"It is a shame that stinketh to the heaven of Ibrahim Khalilu 'llah," said the Kadi.

"We will imprison the woman until she returns to Islam or die. Is it not the law for dealing with a female apostate, as given in the blessed Hidayah from the very words of An Nabi's self?—and may bliss attend his beard!" the Moufti added.

For the exact words I cannot vouch, amongst other reasons because I was not born at the time—but I know they held a special sitting over the scandal at the

house of the Kadi: the Kadi himself, the Moufti, and the Imaum being assembled to make a quorum, and from later information and personal acquaintance with the holy men I can hazard a guess at the nature of the arguments advanced. At this point, I make out, the Imaum, an old man and a discreet, spoke:

“Why should we do aught, my brothers? The kin of the woman say naught; it is their duty to first report the matter to us. And, on our part, is it well to open the eyes too wide? One thing is certain: if we do aught Jerningham Effendi will leave the land, if he be not first slain.”

All looked serious, doubtless, at this plain statement. Papa's work brought gain to hundreds of good Moslems; also at that period he had only himself to keep and more than once the surplus of his income had fed half the neighbourhood in famine times.

“Likewise, please Allah, we must consider the disposition of the woman herself,” the Imaum purred on. “She is of the race of Amadiyeh, and all the women of that line be men. With their eyes did not our fathers see how the sister of Ismail Khan fought by her brother's side and slew bearded men not one nor two alone ere their castle fell? Let us load the balances, I pray. It is certain, O my brethren, that she will burn in the Black Fire hereafter for her apostasy, but, answer I beseech, is it a thing of so great moment that, for sake of a handsome Kafir Effendi, a woman of no importance abandons Islam? Folk comprehend, and say in their souls: ‘It is no despite to Islam; it was love, not the doctrine of Isa Ibn Maryam, that lured her.’ On the other scale, put it that if we put her in bonds the courage of her race will cause her to cling to the creed of Isa for scorn of coercion, even to death, and men will say: ‘A great religion this, that giveth such strength to a woman.’ I have spoken.”

The Moufti proposed a brilliant short-cut out of it. Let them disregard the apostasy and simply do Rathia Khan to death for the sin committed in her effort to compass the impossible—to effect a legal marriage between Christian man and Moslemah. Once she was dead—— said the Moufti. The Moufti was young and from Kaiseriya, where they almost forget the main chance in their fanaticism. The elders sat on him promptly. The woman's death would mean the Kafir Effendi's death too, at least his flight. Even a conscience from Kaiseriya quailed when the evil of driving away the gold-producing goose was plainly set forth by its seniors.

They threshed it out. Papa at the time was awaiting their first official move with anxiety not unnatural under the circumstances. During the days of suspense he kept the town well larded with spies, the Wardens of the Gates well bribed, and two sets of Arab garments and two kochelaim mares always ready. Even at that early period he was a worshipped hero in the eyes of all the Bedouin of Irak Arabi and El Jezireh, and the Mosul authorities would have needed fleet steeds to catch him east of Alexandretta.

The day of fate came, and with it the Kadi's head servant to request for his master the eye-salve of Jerningham Effendi's presence at the said master's humble house. Papa went—the spies had prophesied peace—and found the quorum assembled. They talked weather a little, and presently :

“It is known to all, Effendi, that thou art a bridegroom of recent making,” said the Imaum, with winning directness. “Is it not the mode of Frankistan for such a one to give alms to the poor?”

“‘The miser is Allah's foe, yea, though he be a saint : the generous is Allah's friend, yea, though he be a sinner,’” quoted the Moufti, lest Papa should miss

the point and a Kaiseriya conscience be sacrificed in vain.

"Your information respecting Frankish customs is accurate, reverend sirs," said Papa. "I am meditating at present how best to fulfil the laudable custom you have mentioned. I find difficulties in the actual fulfilment, and these I will set forth, if your patience can bear it."

"Thou wilt give to the Christian poor?" hinted the Kadi.

Papa was wordily wroth. "Doth Allah, Whom we all worship, send His rain upon the grass alone and not upon the flowers, or upon the flowers alone, and not upon the grass?" he demanded. "And, I pray ye, answer, shall I be more nice than He with that He hath entrusted to my stewardship? The poor of the Muslim way shall bless me—Inshallah!—as well as those of my own Nasara way. Now, O ye heads of Islam in this place, I dare to crave a favour of your most exceeding kindness. I will in a little time give somewhat to the heads of mine own faith to dole as their wisdom dictateth, and I dare to hope you will give yourselves the toil of distributing what I design for your own poor. Am I too daring?"

They assured him they did not grudge trouble over a benevolent object, and asked: "How much?"

"Five thousand medjidieh," he answered.

Their eyes glistened. A thousand pounds would afford some nice pickings. "Twenty thousand would be better; then could all the poor of Mosul eat one mouthful and bless thee, my son," said the Imaum.

"Six thousand I can make it, Quatbu'd'din, and no more," he answered firmly.

They beat one another, up and down, and compromised on ten thousand. And two thousand pounds, plus a few extra given, for decency's sake, to the Christian poor, was the price of Rathia Khan's secession. The poor rejoiced, and if the Moufti invested in a Baghdadi

pace mule and the Kadi's household was swelled by the addition of a Nubian slave-girl soon after, verily, it is unmannerly to put two and two together unasked.

Socially, there was no scandal. It was undeniable that Mrs. R—— of the British Vice-Consulate was not more certainly the spouse of her Vice-Consul than that the new-comer was legally Mrs. Jerningham (of Jerningham Chase, Northants, England, and Mosul, Vilayat of Mosul, Asiatic Turkey). The new Mrs. Jerningham, then, became an established fact. The other Mosul ladies even refrained from open comment on her hair, which was of the exact tint produced by superincumbent applications of henna and indigo on a ruddy foundation.

After a short stay in Mosul, just long enough for her to get used to European frocks and saddles, they spent little time in the city, wandering for a large part of every year on the Assyriological track. In Mosul I first dawned on the gaze of a censorious world. My hair, precociously abundant, warm of tint, and with a white blaze in front, was a trial of faith to our friends, but they said, bravely, that I probably took after some of Papa's great-grandparents. No cause for comment was given when I was christened Rathia—it is not the Turkey-in-Asiatic custom to name children after their parents, and, besides, my mother's name was Sourma—though she sometimes forgot to respond when Papa called to her.

Two busy years followed, the family travels usually took their course about Kurdistan—a country Europeans will persist in calling Armenia. There Papa found the vanguard forts of Tukultai-Palesharra's Empire and lost his wife.

We were camped on a mound near Khairan; he went to Moush in a hurry, meaning to return soon; he was detained, and came back to find she was dead, and already buried with the hasty burial of the East.

Chapter II

THE CONGREVE ALLIANCE

ALL that pertains to my mother I know, necessarily, from hearsay. From hearsay also I know that Papa was heart-broken, for a time, and fled the East, taking me with him, and Sulti with me.

Sulti is an Armenian; she had been servant to Rathia Khan when she lived on Nebbi Younus, and when her mistress died it was not curious that she should search for a new one. So she passed into the service of the new Mrs. Jerningham, and now she was my nurse, a fiercely loving, scolding, adoring Eastern nurse.

At this period my more tangible memories begin, perhaps owing to the violent change from Western Asia to Middle England. I was introduced to a new order of beings—aunts. They had all of them cold blue eyes, said "Oh," at the beginning of all remarks, and handled me gingerly. I now know that they feared I might bite. In confidence I asked Sulti if they were women. She cocked her chin and answered, no, they were ladies—Feringhi ladies. I did not like them much, nor did I like the house—the rooms were over-large, and full of frightening shadows; nor the country—the rain rained almost every day.

There were compensations—open fires, for example, and a vivid picture at the bottom of a certain china bowl. These never palled; there was no chance of satiety, as they were hedged about with restrictions,

open fires being fortified by wire guards and officious grown-ups, and the picture only to be enjoyed after the consumption of a superincumbent layer of bread and milk. I always think of that picture when the men are clearing down from Parthian remains to a pre-Sargonic pavement. About that time the enviable freedom of grown-ups dawned on me. Sulti said I would be one, by and by, if I behaved. I was determined that when by and by came I would never touch bread and milk and would sit inside the fireguard all day.

Tempora mutantur . . . ! After nineteen years I find that I like bread and milk, and object to exposing my complexion to an unscreened blaze.

Now and then it did not rain, and Papa took me for a gallop. The woods were new to me, still more the turf, the ploughed fields, all brindled black and buff, were reminiscent. He sometimes made cryptic remarks to the effect that I would be Lady of the Manor some day. At other times we crept ever so quietly through bushes and high grass to peep at families of brown birds ; these he said were pheasants, our pheasants, and we were great folk because we owned them. Pheasants in the West are the equivalent of Abyssinian slaves in the East.

The company I associated with was mostly grown-up. Sometimes I met it in the nursery, more frequently after dinner, when I was taken in with dessert and handed round like a decanter. The gentlemen invariably showed me the wheels in their watches, some of the younger ladies were not so much afraid of me as the aunts were ; the one who was least afraid of all was Miss Congreve. We met very often ; sometimes she came to see the aunts, and sometimes Papa took me to see her. She lived across the Park, six fields, and another park, in a house like ours ; only larger, with a father and mother and any amount of brothers and sisters.

The father was thin and peppery. He almost lived

on horseback, often gave me rides, and always told Papa afterwards that I was a game little monkey. The mother was of the aunt type, but stout. People called them Lord and Lady Naseby, and Miss Congreve was, in full, the Honourable Evelyn Congreve.

“‘Honourable’ is the English for *Khan*,” Sulti remarked to me once, after we had been nearly a year in England. “Thy mother, the wife of thy father, was a *Khan*.” And it seemed to worry her.

That was one of the days I remember. We had been for a walk, between two showers, in the watery beams of a dull and loathly something that the English servants called the sun. “Sun!” so Sulti jeered bitterly, “This Frankistan is but a great grave where dead suns are hung up to rot, like Parsi corpses in a *Dakhma*.”

An hour later came Papa’s pronouncement. “We are going back to the land of the sun soon, *Rathia*,” he said.

“Happy folk!” sighed Miss Congreve, who was present, one of three. “How I envy you!”

“Do you?” replied Papa sharply. “Run and ask Sulti for a lump of sugar, *Rathia*.”

I obeyed, and missed the succeeding conversation. Soon afterwards we started Eastward Ho! and Miss Congreve with us. During the interim the aunts called me “poor innocent!” to my face. And then you must imagine the land of the sun, and the three of us very happy in it.

My stepmother remains in my memory as a stately, gracious, loving presence. The one distinction that she made between me and her own children, when they arrived, was that, from false sensitiveness, she did not give me all the scoldings I really needed. In Mosul it was whispered that the Honourable Mrs. Jerningham would ruin her husband’s career—city-bred occidental that she was. It is a moot point if the prediction reached her ears; it is fact that she utterly belied it.

Never before did my father work as he did in the twelve years of her companionship: you may read of his triumphs in any text-book. And it was all due to her. No place was too dangerous, and no way of living too rough, for her to be with him. Only when the little ones had to be considered she stayed at Mosul or Baghdad, keeping an endless chain of messengers running between city and camp, when duty stationed him at an unhealthy place.

From the first I was never parted from her; when she travelled I travelled too. And oh, the heavenly joy of journeying then! A landscape of palm-plumed desert-edge, sheeny river, or peaked mountains flowing past, Papa on his grey full Arab with its strung-bow neck and its streaming tail and mane, my stepmother on her pretty bay Hajin, behind a line of giant mules piled high with baggage and led by singing Katarjis, an escort of stately dalouls lifting their white-draped riders high against the blue, or of smart green and orange clad zaptiehs, their bits and scabbards tinkling treble to the base of the swinging mule-bells. Sun and palms and river, work and wayfaring and music to all—a scrap of Eden where Eden was—time ago!

I rode in a kajaweh, which is a species of lidless coffin slung by pairs on mule-back. When we marched long, or by night, I slept in it too. The other was loaded, to balance me, with my stepmother's private traps. At night a mosquito-net was over me, and the ever-fascinating stars were doubly attractive because doubly remote. Any one could tell me all about the stars, and the most was about Orion and the lost Pleiad—poor lonely creature—out in space with nobody to cling to when it became frightening!

At that period we sometimes lived in tents, and sometimes in our Mosul home. To me the distinction was that I sometimes played on a sand-heap, and some-

times in a garden. Evelyn arrived during a garden epoch. A year after our wanderings recommenced, and she proved eminently intelligent, and was quite a woman, promoted to short skirts and able to take her share in a sensible conversation, by the time the next arrival came. Play on a sand-heap was super-joy now, travelling triple fun with two in the kawajeh.

The second arrival was a boy. Muhammadan friends felt they could congratulate Papa without resting under suspicion of irony. Two more boys followed, then several splendid years with us all together, until tragedy intervened again, and my second mother went her way and left more hearts forlorn than one could reckon.

Chapter III

THE COMING OF EVELYN

AFTER his second loss our father fled the East again. Now it was the turn of Evelyn and the boys to be introduced to the aunts, and, because they were all blue-eyed, amber-haired replicas of their mother, the aunts took them into high favour at once. This was as it should be; likewise they were pleased to approve of me more at sixteen than they did at three.

A great deal of our time was passed, by invitation, at Congreve Towers. Lady Naseby cried outright at her first meeting with Evelyn. Lord Naseby turned his back on us for some time on the same occasion. Evelyn thought grandfathers had bad manners, but I understood when he muttered something about setting the clock back twenty years.

We stayed in England two years. To me they were divided into one of rigid home training, and one of Society. And how wearisome they were to a girl who had lived in tent and saddle since her real memory began only that girl knows! Then the Call of the East and the prayers of the Oxford Fund could be resisted no longer, and it was ho! for the Assyriological road again.

I went with my father, but it had been my step-mother's last wish that her children should be brought up by her own people. At eighteen Evelyn was to choose with whom she would cast in her lot, the boys

were to choose at one-and-twenty. It is my belief that in her heart of hearts their mother had a dread of the Orient.

Four glorious years passed: four years of hardship and triumph, of unbeaten tracks, hard toil in the enchanting orts of bygone civilisations, oases of warm-hearted Eastern hospitality, bad seasons passed in our trophy-hung Mosul home, then—Papa's blunder.

Evelyn was eighteen that year, and, as we had not been in England since I was eighteen myself, we felt we must hear her decision from her own lips. We left Piers in charge and hied us to Roum.

Piers Blessington is my cousin, the only child of Papa's favourite sister. She was the only one who was not cold-eyed, and that was why she made a runaway *mésalliance*, and was glad, when she was left a widow, to let Papa see the boy through Harrow and Oxford. Now for two years Piers had been our second in command.

We killed two birds by going to England via Constantinople. Our firman had just completed its span of four years, and Papa had to get the Padishah to grant a new one. That was in the pushing, golden 'nineties, you will understand, when, spite of the Bulgarian scandal, Papa was not ashamed to sue for a favour from Abdul Hamid. Piers was all agog to come, too, but Papa informed him candidly: "It is a matter of blarneying H—— Bey, my boy, and Madame H—— Bey, and Rathia's worth ten of you at that game. You stop and see that the Louvre Expedition does not stake a claim on any of our mounds."

H—— Bey directs the Stamboul Museum and advises the Shadow of Allah in matters æsthetic. I, accordingly, called with affectionate haste on Madame H—— Bey, a Turkified Frenchwoman, and talked dress, discases, and domestics to her to such effect that when Papa paid his official begging visit to her husband and flattered

him over his recent acquisition of the Sidon sarcophagi the Bey had his orders. "Go about your business as you choose, Jerningham Effendi, for as long as you like and in peace of mind," said he. "After a month, please Allah, when you choose to claim it, the firman will be ready."

A week's voyage, two of English weather, a week to return. That would suit us exactly. We got all ready, and in the end Papa went and I stayed behind.

It was Mrs. Kent's fault. The Reverend Mr. Kent is chief of the Kharlis Mission. Kharlis is in the back wilds beyond Lake Van. The two were taking their first holiday in ten years, and, for a beginning Mrs. Kent caught fever. They had no particular friends in the city; it appeared to me that a bout of fever with no woman you know well to look after you is a poor way of spending a holiday; so I stayed to nurse her. When she stopped chanting the Azan and selections from Hymns A. and M. indiscriminately and took an interest in life again she was horrified.

"What will your sister think?" she wailed. "As it is a foregone conclusion she will stay in England, it means that you are not likely to see her for some years. And you have been parted for four——"

"The dad will explain about you," I replied. "If she is the kind of girl she was before she will think I did right."

"But if she is not that kind of girl now, and thinks it unkind of you not to come and see her——"

"Then I don't care a Parthian shard for her opinion."

At the end of the month I had pulled her on to her feet again. On the thirtieth day after Papa's departure we had our conversation with Mrs. Jocelyn, and when we had got rid of her it was time to go and meet the ship.

We drove off, four of us, the fourth of the party

being Rifaat Bey, a delightful young Palace A.D.C., who had been told off to look after us. Really orthodox people tell me that World To Be is probably even lovelier than a late summer day by the Golden Horn, but it is hard to believe. Crisp, mild sunshine cutting the piled houses and terraced gardens of Pera, and the massed domes and minarets of Stamboul sharply against the glowing sky, cool air soughing through the streets, intangibly redolent of the aroma of spiced earthiness that is the Eastern characteristic *par excellence*, the diapason of a hurrying but orderly crowd in the more populous parts, and in the quieter roads near the water-side the dull ripple of waves and the subdued murmur from the shipping.

Those same streets ran red and slimy with Armenian blood in the Years of the Shambles. But I was not there then, and it was not the fault of the beautiful city, and it is beautiful still.

And the Bridge of Galata and its throng! A throng wherein coal-black negroes jostle bleached folk from the Caucasus, where ladies in the latest Paris modes brush shoulders with filthy, skin-clad Dervishes from Balkh and Samarkand and Fars, Arabs in shroud-like burnouses, Circassians draped with cartridge belts, thick-nosed Armenians, and Mongolians with no noses worth mention in their large faces, and through the mass a leavening of pariah dogs and beggars, and a clacking of different tongues like the minute after the curse fell on Babel so that every man said to his fellow: "Excuse me, I did not catch what you said just now," a separate language!

On the Embassy launch we steamed out to meet the little speck that stood for the ship. The waves danced, the yelkovans swarmed and circled in the blue, we alternately looked at St. Sophia's fairy dome and the growing speck. The Bey produced binoculars.

"I can see the dad," I announced after a look.

"Where?" Mrs. Kent took the glasses.

"By the rails before the bridge, to port," I elucidated. "You cannot mistake his suit. I almost went on my knees to try and induce him not to get that chessboard pattern. He has his glasses up too. I believe he sees me—I am rather conspicuous in any view. Yes, he is waving his hand."

"I wonder who the lady who has just joined him is," said Mr. Kent, taking a look in turn.

"Somebody he has made friends with on the voyage," I replied easily. "All women treat him like a pet uncle after an hour's acquaintance."

"They certainly appear to be on excellent terms," the missionary observed diffidently. "I may be mistaken in my impression that she embraced him fervently just now, but she certainly has taken his glasses without ceremony."

With a sudden chill at the brain I took the binoculars. As I got them trained on the mysterious woman she succeeded in sighting me. At once Papa's treasured glasses were on the deck and she was leaning over the rail blowing kisses to me.

In a dazed way, "It is Evelyn," I said.

Chapter IV

A GREAT SURPRISE

EVEN alongside the ship I found it difficult to credit the evidence of my senses. Only when the accommodation ladder was down and Evelyn was first on our deck did I comprehend the overwhelming truth. With the dear child in my arms, laughing a great deal and almost crying a little, and planting kisses indiscriminately on all my features, it was no time for analysis of emotions. We were nearing the landing-stage when Papa spoke complacently:

"Were you surprised when you got our letters?" he asked.

"Letters?" I repeated, "I only got one reporting how every one was when you reached London."

"Only that?" Evelyn exclaimed. "What about the big packet; with notes from grandmamma and Aunt Domitia and me, saying I would come unless you wired 'No'?"

"I never received them."

"We thought it a little odd you didn't wire at all, but Papa said you always take things easily." She turned on him with a reproachful finger raised. "Papa, did you post that package?"

He quailed and subsided into a weak smirk. "I might have expected it!" she cried tragically. "Was there ever such a man?"

"Comes of leaving Miksi behind," he apologised.

She forgave him. You cannot remain long vexed with a plump little brown man who looks like a school-boy playing at middle-age. Particularly when he tries to twist a grin of enjoyment of his own cleverness into a penitential droop. "After all, it will be an extra surprise for you to receive me without warning," she added.

"It is," I murmured feebly. She hugged me afresh.

"And I'm to live with you for good and all, you dear old thing!" she cried. "Aren't you glad?"

The mischief being done past remedy, I said I was glad. "A comforting lie is better than a paining truth," says Sa'adi. The landing-stage gave me a breathing-space.

Mr. Kent stopped to see to the baggage, but even his absence left five of us, and five in a carriage is vulgar. The Bey went on the box and looked enough like a very superior kind of footman, but I felt bank holiday-ish for all that. Evelyn squeezed my hand in a state of utter rapture all the way to the Rue de Pera. Papa, opposite, was smiling widely, perfectly satisfied that he had done something clever. I feared that Mrs. Kent's efforts to suppress unseemly laughter would have serious effects on her constitution. Our arrival at the hotel just saved her in time.

There was some satisfaction about taking Evelyn up for an introduction to Sulti. It is hard to ruffle the composure of an Oriental servant, but my sister succeeded in the task when she advanced with outstretched hand on my faithful henchwoman and demanded: "Do you know me, Sulti?"

Sulti rose to the occasion, kissed the hand, and beat a masterly retreat under excuse of engaging another room. Over the succeeding business of prinking and afternoon tea we tided safely, likewise. Evelyn was still full of rapture and talk. The first serious words

were spoken when she had stepped into Mrs. Kent's apartments to see something.

"Mart Maryam, and she is to come with us—through Kurdistan—Rathia Khatoun!" whispered Sulti. "That raw, and English, and too lovely little Khatoun! The saints help us!"

Papa succeeded her, all smiles. "It was a surprise for you—eh, dear?" he beamed.

"It was," I agreed, with emphasis.

He noted the tone, some of the radiance left his dear, kind face. "Rathia, am I to understand that you are not pleased to have your sister with you?" he asked.

"You always get things wrong, dad," I hastened to say. "You can see for yourself I'm delighted to have the dear child—delighted. But you know I must think of other things. There's her wardrobe for one."

"That's all right, child; she has nine trunks and seven portmanteaux," he replied easily. "I'm sure she was the best-dressed woman on the ship."

"Her frills and laces are satisfactory, I don't doubt," I made answer. "What worries me is how she is off for woollens and furs. *En passant*, I trust she has brought her pet saddle."

He shook his head reproachfully, and answered in a tone of gentle chiding: "Rathia, my dear child, I am sorry to find fault with you, but there is a serious defect in your nature. I refer to the material, almost sordid, point of view which you display at times. You should try and overcome this tendency, Rathia; look always at the bright and beautiful side of life, and trust Providence for all mere necessities."

I said I would. Anything to please him. All the same, it seems to me that Providence attends to necessities by sending us the sense and energy to attend to

them for ourselves. I was still feeling rather sore when I settled down for a talk with Evelyn.

"Horne's in the Fifth now," she informed me. "No end of prizes, but such a scamp! It takes all a girl's pocket-money to keep him out of rows with Grandpapa. How he'll manage now——! He says it is all heredity, and has collected such a lot of tales about Papa's Harrovian days. Aren't we proud of Papa, too! By the way, and strictly between us, are you not sorry he accepted that knighthood?"

"I felt like tearing my hair when he wired he had accepted it. It was a task to sham pleasure. He only did it to draw public attention to the Fund, but it's detestable."

"It is," she agreed. "Any one can be made a K.C.B. but it takes brains to become a Professor. Is that why you have been so sad ever since we arrived?" she asked suddenly.

"Sad, Evelyn?" I repeated.

"Well, you are not the jolly Rathia of four years ago. Are you so vexed about the title? Or have you grown reserved and subdued? Or"—her womanly intuition leapt to the truth—"are you not really pleased to have me here?"

For a few minutes I was too taken aback by the abrupt inquiry to find an answer, and sat looking at her in silence. No doubt about her beauty. A year before, when her Presentation photograph came to Mosul, Papa winced at the first glimpse, and told me I might keep it in my own quarters. He did not say that it hurt him because it was so like her mother, but I knew, even without aid of the passage in her accompanying letter:

"And, do you know, Rathia, old ladies and old gentlemen introduce me to one another as: 'Beauty Congreve's little girl'? Every one remembers Mamma

so well; did you find out what a celebrity she was when you were Out?——”

And, now that I beheld her, full-grown, Beauty Congreve's daughter was a fit successor to her mother's reputation. Four years before she had been in the betwixt and between stage, all black stockings and hair and eyes; the interval had developed her into a girl of Du Maurier's loveliest type: slender, flat-backed, and wide-shouldered, with small, proudly set head, wide-spaced eyes, the tint of purest Naishapour turquoises, drooping under-lids, a spare, sharply cut chin, and slightly waving hair of rich golden-brown.

My silence as I considered her must have been ominous to the poor child. When I ceased to take too much abstract interest in her beauty to notice the human details of it the heavenly eyes were shaded and the sweet, full underlip tucked in, like a child's, to stop its quivering. No deceiving her was possible. I gathered her in my arms, kissed the troubled lids and lips, and told the unadulterated truth—a thing I do not always consider advisable.

“I am glad, so glad, to have you with me, my dear,” I said. “So glad. I am only troubled to think of your being dragged through Kurdistan—a land of discomforts and misery, hardships, and evil sights and tales.”

“Is that all?” she brightened at once. “If you can stand it I can. That's what Papa said when Grand-mamma and the Aunties wanted to wait for an answer from you before we started.”

“My accompanying him has spoilt Papa. Asiatic Turkey is no place for a lady; I am simply the necessary exception to the rule. I know the peoples of it, their ways, their tongues, their habits of thought. Now you have lived in England for years——”

“But I remember Turkey well, and it was heavenly.”

“My dear girl, in those days we were under Mamma's

kind, capable wing," I replied gently. "Now we rough it. People will say we rough it *en prince*, but I really am concerned as to how you will face the seamy side of an antiquary's life. Tenting is not always an absolute Gulistan; sometimes we can't even tent it, and some of the places where we have sheltered——"

"If you can stand it, I can," she responded stoutly.

"Inshallah!" I responded. "Look, for instance, at the drinking-water question. What will you do if you happen to espy our man-of-all-work filling the tea-kettle at a village duck-pond—a Turkish village pond?"

"Throw something at him. And then have hysterics, I presume, or faint. It won't matter, as you can attend to me."

"I'll simply pinch you, *quant. suff.*, in either case, so do not try the experiment, my dear. And I give you fair warning that a great deal of my time is spent in doctoring native ailments."

"I'll help. I used to attend to all the school-room splinters and burns after you left."

"Um'm. And when we are up north do you think you will mind having to break the ice on your bath water every morning?"

"Since, from your tone, you are accustomed to that; you can do it for me."

"You certainly have one of the gifts of a born antiquary!" I cried, laughing.

"Cheek?" she peeped at me demurely through her golden lashes. "Then you don't consider me such a hopeless case?"

"I begin to have hope. One question, though. You know we do all our travelling *à cheval*; can you ride?"

"Rathia! that to a Northampton girl! Don't you remember——"

"—that you used to turn up at meets on an awful

little scrub of a pony? Yes, but can you now ride w-e-double l, my dear?"

She dived for an open trunk and fished out a waistcoat. "There"—exhibiting the garment triumphantly—"Hunt buttons! And you know they're the only things—besides the V.C. and Order of St. John of Jerusalem—that can't go by favour or money. Dear, if I promise to be good and obedient, I won't be such a drag after all, will I?"

Again she peered, adorably coaxing, through the aureate screen. I hugged her again for answer, and we addressed ourselves seriously to the wardrobe question.

Chapter V

WE GO TO THE PLAY

As a ruler Abdul the Ever Praiseworthy had his shortcomings, but it is not for the Jerningham family to sit in judgment on him. One of life's most distressing problems crops up when you have accepted favours from a man who afterwards indulges in a course of conduct to which you cannot conscientiously accord your approbation, and you cannot get rid of a feeling of gratitude towards him.

Certainly the Last of the Real Padishahs heaped attentions on us, and the crowning one came a week after Papa's return. The hotel was thrown into a flutter over the sudden coming of H—— Bey and a group of palace officials. They bore the insignia of the Liakat for Papa, the Nisan-i-Shefaket for me, and the firman. And what a firman!

"A personal favour to your father, Jerningham Effendina," H—— Bey whispered as he departed. "Also the last of such range that ever will be granted."

When they were gone we spread it out and gloated. "It's a beauty!" I declared.

"It is; it would do to trim a matinee hat," Evelyn agreed.

As she could not read Jari her attention was devoted to the caligraphic flourishes and the bourgeoning of seals. I was thinking of the subject-matter.

"This is the Noble, Exalted, Brilliant Sign Manual,

the World-illuminating and Adorning Cipher of the Khaquan (may it be made Efficient by the aid of the Lord and the protection of the Eternal!). His Order is——’ ”

And, to paraphrase, the tenor was that Abdul Hamid, by the Grace of Allah, Padishah, Khalifah, Amiru 'l Muamin, and Shadow of Allah on earth, empowered Sir Horne Jerningham, Knight Companion of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath, Commander of the Most Exalted Orders of the Liakat and Medjidieh, Master of Arts and Doctor of Literature, to make such excavations as his wisdom directed in all land, saving musjid bounds and places of interment, within the Vilayets of Van, Mosul, and Baghdad. And further ordered that all Valis, Mutessariffs, and lesser officials should assist the said Sir Horne Jerningham—and so forth.

When we had quite done our gloating—"I forgot to tell you, girls," said Papa. "The Persian Ambassador met me this morning; he sent his compliments to you, Rathia, and wants us all to come to the Tazzia to-night. I did not like to decline outright, so said I'd see if you had any previous engagement."

"We might as well go," I replied.

"Rathia! The Muharram show! You have been there before."

"Precisely; but Evelyn has not."

"Just as well. It's not a scene for ladies. Though Heaven knows plenty of them patronise it."

"What is it?" demanded Evelyn, all agog.

"Ashura Day, tenth of the month Muharram. It's a kind of Passion Play procession."

"Let's go," she begged.

"It's nasty," he replied, and, naturally, redoubled her desire.

"And dirty," he concluded, and made up her mind for her. She plumped down on the sofa beside him

and coaxed. To save time, I wrote the acceptance while he was resisting. "I shall put on a skirt and shoes I won't mind burning afterwards," I observed. "And I'd advise you to do the same."

"How sweetly mysterious!" she gushed. "What is it like?"

"1 Kings xviii. 28, child," said Papa grimly.

"I don't remember what that is, and I will not look it up, but keep to-night for a surprise," she returned.

During the preceding week, between bouts of shopping, we had taken her to see the regulation lions. Papa took us over the Seraglio and Treasury, and bought her a little, snapping yellow dog from the Sultan's kennelman. We went to Friday Selamlık procession. We took her to St. Sophia, and she was disappointed because I could not specify the exact spot where the wall opened and closed again after the priest had stepped in with the Host as the Islamites were taking Byzantium. We showed her the Riven Tower, and the little-known, ever-burning lamp over the spot where the last Constantine of Byzantium lies, and the Golden Gate through which the Conqueror rode in triumph, and which has been bricked up ever since to turn aside the prophecy that another Conqueror will in his time follow leader through it. Rifaat Bey arranged picnics at the Sweet Waters, at Kendeli, and the Forest of Belgrade, and escorted us to hear the Arab cacophony at the Holy Well, and to spend a happy day with his pretty wife on rose-grown Prinkipo. For the improvement of her mind, we spent likewise a couple of days at Brusa with Mrs. Kent as dragon, saw the Ladies' Baths at Chakgireh, and bought corn out of Sultan Selim's Bowl for Muhammadan friends at Mosul. Finally, Madame H—Bey and I introduced her to several harems where we were on visiting terms.

She made a sensation. Turks do not say much, but

several ladies assured me that they would not have had her as an inmate of their establishments—not for my envied Order of the Shefaket. An oblique tribute to the Congreve good looks. The girl was in a state of ecstasy all the time. “I do not see much difference between Orientals and Europeans, except that Orientals are pleasantest,” she informed me on the sixth day.

That was what made me think it would do her good to see the Tazzia. . . .

Behold us then, at dusk, driving to the Persian quarter, the Bey on the box, Mrs. Kent coming as Propriety, and in a state of disgusted astonishment at me. She, also, had been there before.

The procession’s custom is to make several circuits of the khans of the Iranian district during the evening. The Ambassador had hired a big room with a balcony overlooking the courtyard of the principal establishment. There they waited for the tamasha to begin, while the Ambassador’s pretty little slave-boy ran round with weak Persian tea and peppery Persian cigarettes, and Evelyn leant staring over the balcony rail and amused us all with her griffin enthusiasm.

The vast square presented a scene bizarre enough, and redolent enough of the East to satisfy the most determined searcher after local colour. Immense petroleum bonfires flared here and there, casting lurid light upon the trunks of the trees that dotted the space, and giving an added blackness to the dark boscage of their upper branches, which led up and melted into the dusky sky, and imparting an extra tang to the reek of stale scent, sewer-gas, and infrequently washed humanity which packed every inch of the quadrangle save a narrow lane that was kept clear by white-wanded volunteer police. Down this lane in due course came the pageant, preceded by the sound of chanting topped by childish voices wailing : “Hosain kafan na-dared !” in piteous chorus.

The crowd hushed, and we all pressed to view Constantinople's contribution to the annual unchaining of the hysteria of the Shiah world.

"Hosain kafan na-dared!" So the chorus soughed and wailed. "Means 'Hosain had no winding-sheet,' Evie," I explained as the train filed past in the glare of the fires. "You see, the whole performance is in memory of Hosain, the Prophet's grandson. The Shiahs think he was the last true Khalif."

First passed a company of children on horseback with men afoot beside them, the men gesticulating, reciting inarticulately scraps from the Saga of Hosain, and crying. Then a snowy-white Kermanshah stallion with two doves tethered to its crimson velvet saddle.

"Symbol of the souls of Hosain and his brother Hasan, Effen'," Rifaat Bey informed Evelyn.

A bier followed, borne shoulder-high; on it a little figure stuck all over with arrows and smeared realistically with gouts of scarlet paint.

"Ali Akhbar, son of Hosain, Effen'," volunteered the Bey. "Hosain and all his people were slain at Kerbela by the Syrians supporting the rival Khalif Yezid; and that is why these folk weep."

The close-packed mass below was beginning to sway and rock as a chant in unison rose from it: "Hasan—Ya! Hosain! Hosain! Hosain—Ya! Hosain kafan na-dared!" Keeping them company in it, a rabble of men and boys was streaming past after Ali Akhbar's bearers.

"These Shiahs think Hasan and Hosain were the last of the Rightly Directed Khalifahs, Effen'," the Bey proclaimed. "I am Sunni."

"And do not Sunnis believe in the Rightly Directed Khalifahs?" she inquired.

"Effen', we hold that or Padisah, the most powerful Moslem prince of his day, is the Khalifah."

“You do not keep Muharram, then ?”

The Bey shook his head gravely. He had been watching the Shiah celebration with the expression a Plymouth Brother might be expected to wear if he found himself in Naples on the Day of St. Januarius. “Nay, Effen’,” he answered. “Still, to-day we fast, remembering that on Ashura Day it pleased Allah Al Khaliq to create Adam and Eve, Hell and Heaven, the Pen, Life and Death. He is Great and Merciful !”

To the number of a thousand and more the men and boys had now filed past, then came the cream of the cortège. It was divided into three bands. The first a company of men in white shirts open over the hairy chests, on which they smote each fist alternately in perfect unison and in time to their shouts of “Ya Hasan ! Ya Hosain !” The men of the second group, white-clad also, swung each a length of chain rhythmically, with a dancing motion and a clanging chorus. The third division sidled along, in two lines facing one another, each man grasping the girdle of his neighbour with his left hand and swinging a sword with his right. Between the lines paced men reciting the Saga of the Death of Hosain. The whole glanced into the light of the bonfire opposite us, out of the dusk it came from, and streamed into the dusk ahead, and so on in order *en route* for the next khan.

“It was very interesting,” said Evelyn, as we all began to talk again, and the girl-faced Kalianchi busied himself with the refreshments. Her voice, less polite than her words, added : “Is that all ?”

“Wait a bit ; they must warm to their work,” I returned.

We leant together on the rail. The crowd was chanting with increased fervour : “Hosain kafan na-dared !” Here and there a man stood reciting ; round these the enthusiasm thickened, rough, coarse men sobbed like children over the tale of how Hosain died at holy, fatal

Kerbela. "What is the difference between Sunnis and Shiah's?" she asked.

"To European experience it is the difference between Spaniards of Torquemada's time and modern Broad Church folk. In rustic regions, when the bucolic Sunni beholds a European lady he contents himself with flinging mud and the proper feminine for unclean animals. The Shiah Colin Clout, under similar conditions, uses cobbles and aims for the face."

"What a lot of different types!" she commented. "Who is that?"

She indicated a tall youth who was chanting in a fine baritone, his eyes aflame, his hands gesticulating passionately, and the foam on his lips, in a packed circle that wept and wrung its hands.

"A Rawzekhan, a professional elegy-singer. From Shiraz, by his accent. Most probably he has soap in his mouth; he will certainly pass round the cap when he thinks he has racked the feelings of his hearers a full piastre's-worth."

"Well, I suppose he must earn his living. The emotion of the audience is genuine, at any rate. What is the short, handsome man who is blubbering aloud and has to mop his eyes on his fur jacket whenever the singer says 'Hosain!' in falsetto?"

"A Mingrelian. And the two with greasy black plaits are Lazès."

"And the moustached Apollo by the nearest fire?"

Her Apollo was a young man in a shawl jacket, sailor trousers of sky blue silk, and a voluminous shawl-sash. Yards of silver chain were draped round him and attached to a torquoise-hilted dagger at his waist; his nose was of falcon pattern, his moustache dyed bright orange and peaking downlike the tusks of a walrus. He was not over six-and-thirty, and a silver badge glittered at the front of his red-and-white turban.

"A Kurd. A Beg by token of his turban, and probably from the neighbourhood of Lake Van—you shall see it—Inshallah, Evelyn!—the badge is that of the Padishah's new bodyguard, the Hamidieh."

"And the people on the adjoining balcony?" she proceeded, with a twinkle in her skyey eyes.

"Your ethnology is indifferent, even for your years, if you do not know a Yankee tourist when you see it," I replied.

The Americans were chaperoned by a Syrian dragoon, and were four in number, a trio of pretty, fluffy-haired girls and a high-nosed, supercilious, tall, and swarthy young man, clean-shaven, blue of chin, and bearing rather a likeness to a whitewashed Cherokee. The girls were discussing St. Sophia with their escort and shirt-waists with one another by alternations.

"And did you notice the print of the hand on the wall, Connie?—such a duck! I noticed one exactly like it in Peter Robinson's window—Sultan Mahomet put it there when he climbed up the pile of dead Christians—with two tucks all round—and you can see through the white-wash the figures of the angels—in Liberty silk——"

At this point the chant of the returning procession became audible. An added wildness was about it. Again the cortège streamed along the lane. The noise was now deafening. The several units glanced into the bale-fire light fronting us, from out of the close-packed, murmurous, night-capped dark behind; and swirled out of view into the crowd and murk ahead. The children at the head reeled in their saddles, squealing most abominably in the extremity of hysterical emotion, the men beside them stuttered over the recital with voices half cracked. Ali Akhbar rocked on his bier as his bearers swayed, drunk with emotion; the rabble of men and lads flowed past screaming and tearing their hair, some bit their arms and howled, animal-like, with

mouths choked by flesh, some rolled down, foaming, and were trampled underfoot.

Then the devotees. The first was heralded by a steady thunder, like the crash of steam-hammers on wood, as they beat their breasts in regular cadence and with all their strength.

A clanking like the cacophony of a Cunarder's anchor-links running out preceded the second group as, with unaltered regularity, they swung their chains over their heads now and down on their naked backs until the torn flesh streamed red.

The third company was less noisy. The two lines still swung on, sideways and steadily, but now the blades were coming down in good earnest on heads and shoulders. Chance puffs of breeze brought to us the acrid sickly reek that cannot be mistaken for anything else. The shirts were half red, the pavement, as they passed, trickled red, with smeary red footprints at the edges; a few fell out of the ranks. One with a cut artery rolled and died against a pillar of our balcony. Then some of the police rushed in, falling into step and holding staves over their heads to keep the devotees from hacking one another to death.

"I think it is time to go," said Evelyn, when the tail of the red and white procession had vanished into the continuation of the dusk it came from.

"But—Inshallah!—they will be round again, Evelyn Khanoum," the Ambassador informed her anxiously. He was a nice, fatherly old gentleman, who loved to see young folk enjoying themselves.

"We have a saying in Frankistan that enough is as good as a feast, Excellency," she replied demurely.

So we gave him the "Khuda Hafiz," and departed. So ended the Passion Play, and so to the Afterpiece.

Chapter VI

WE ACT IN THE AFTERPIECE

EVEN in that short time, thanks to the heat, the pools on the track of the procession had begun to coagulate; a little opalescence flickered on them in the leaping fire-light. The people were still half entranced with hysteria and our kavasses would have made an undisturbed way for us to the lane where our carriage waited but for the Americans.

They had had enough, too, and, escorted by one of their Embassy kavasses, were walking nearly abreast of us. The crowd scowled at us for misbelievers, but made a way for the Bey's uniform.

He was deep in conversation with Evelyn. "Now, Effen'," he began, "can you tell me why Frankish ladies come to gaze at these ugly sights?"

"Indeed, I cannot, Bey Effen'. Ask me an easier question, ask me when, for instance, a door is not a door!"

"'When is a door not a door'?" he repeated in bewilderment.

She gave him the answer, and, as he stared blankly, explained in detail. At the conclusion he smiled a ceremonial smile.

"Chok yakshi! Ajar, a little open; a jar, a vase. Mas'allah, an excellent play on words!" he pronounced solemnly.

The Americans were near, within easy earshot. It

certainly was overpowering to encounter somebody who spoke English like an Oxford don and yet did not know the doyen of conundrums. The Bey's pronouncement was too much for the overstrung nerves of one of the girls; she giggled shrilly.

"Don't do that again if you do not want to get us all massacred," I said, turning to her.

She was sober enough with offended dignity at once, but it looked as though the mischief was done already. The Hamidieh Bey was near us; at sound of the irritating nasal cachinnation, which jarred perceptibly on the nerves of every one within hearing, he swung round to face us, his features dusky red.

"Penah be Khoda!" he snarled. "Look, O my brethren, see ye how the dog-fathered of Frankistan bring their women without shame, the daughters of a long line of noseless mothers, to jeer our Tazzia!"

The Zaza he used, speaking primarily to a knot of his countrymen, was unintelligible to the majority of folk present, but his look and tone after that maddening giggle were enough. The mob ceased to make way for us. We were isolated in a sea of enraged, low-class Eastern fanatics, and the ominous cries, "Kupak Ogli!" "Naisri! Isawi!" began to rise.

"Beg Effen', Beg Effen', place the Snaffle of Discretion on the Tongue of Thoughtlessness, in Name of Allah 'r Rashed!" cried our dismayed A.D.C. to the Kurd. "Thou wilt cause a riot, and endanger the lives of these the friends of our lord the Padishah."

"Naught know I of friends of our lord the Padishah—Allah Al Hafiz be with him now and ever!—I do but speak a true word concerning certain Isawi, the spawn of burnt parents, who come to flout our holy mystery," So the Beg replied in careful Turkish.

The murmurs grew ominous. Papa and the American man looked grim, the dragoman unostentatiously melted

away from our dangerous vicinity, the three kavasses joined forces and tried to make a cordon round the eight of us. The Bey tried authority.

"Effen', I am an officer of the Sultan's household——" he began.

"Thou art a Sunni, and what is it to thee that Hosain lay without a shroud at Kerbela, and that Giaours come to mock thereat?"

Things were beginning to look black for us. A pebble took off Papa's hat. I drew Evelyn's arm through mine and was charmed to find it so steady. "Thy friends be Isawi," the Kurd continued.

In Turkey every self-respecting person objects to being called a Christian publicly. I objected. It appeared to me high time that somebody took that Kurd in hand. "Ye of the Hamidieh were brought to Roum to be soldiers of the Padishah, yea, and to keep order within his domains, yea, even within this part that is not an hour's ride from his own House of the Star," I said, stepping forward. "Can one make attar of nettles, however? Can one, I pray thee answer, make soldiers of wild animals? Nay, not the Padishah's self; it is well said in the old saying: 'The Kurd, be he Pir or brigand, is evermore a bear.'"

He gaped at the phenomenon of a Frankish lady discouraging flawless Zaza and Kurdish bywords. I had brought Evelyn into danger and now there was no royal road out saving *de l'audace, et toujours de l'audace*. "Now it is perceptible to my understanding that thy conduct is dictated by wisdom, my brother," I proceeded. "Whatever power thou mayest exercise over thine handful of a tribe, thou hast no real influence within this city, and to hide the fact thou pretendest thou art too much of a Kurd—of a bear of the mountains—to understand thy duty as one of the Hamidieh."

And I sneered. *Toujours de l'audace!* He turned

and bawled a command in Zaza, every Kurd within hearing pushed to him, they formed a ring round us, and, with blows and threats, drove a way to the lane where we were bound. And none resisted the Hamidieh.

Our lane was empty. By the carriage my Beg put his hand to his knee, breast, and brow, and bowed deeply to me. "Thou errest, Khanoum. Ischaryar Beg of Kilmaru forgets for an eyelid's twinkle that he is a guardsman of the Padishah, but for all that he is as well able—by the Grace of Allah—to keep order here as amidst his own tribe. And of the order he keeps in his tribe; and it is more than a handful—Mas'allah!—the Khanoum shall learn if it please Him to guide her footsteps to Kalmaru."

"If Allah 'r Rashed brought me to Kalmaru I fear Ischaryar Beg would remember my taunt of to-night," I replied, smiling full in his eyes.

He looked back fairly. "Khanoum, Ischaryar will remember that in great, lonely Roum he heard for the one time an unveiled woman speak to him in his own tongue. Sweet is sweet water in the desert, Khanoum. Our unveiled women lash us with the tongue into doing as they decree. When Ischaryar heard the old sound in Roum he told himself it was his sister railing at him."

He bowed again, and, without waiting an answer, clanked back to the khan with his compatriots at his heels.

Evelyn made me translate twice over during the ensuing drive. At the Rue de Pera we elected to walk the rest of the way; it was still early. The scene was peaceful, a night watchman was going his rounds, tapping the flagstones with a staff as he went to warn evil-doers of his approach, in accordance with municipal regulations. The wan moonshine paved our way with checkerwork of white light and black shadow, in secluded corners pariah dogs were trying the worn recipe: "He

(and she and the baby) who sleeps sups," and, for a piece of luck, when we reached a quiet stretch the Americans were preceding us, within easy earshot.

They were discoursing in their national falsetto and nothing short of putting my hands over my ears could save me from eavesdropping. Papa and Mrs. Kent were holding an animated discussion, pianissimo, across me, Evelyn and her *aide* were equally absorbed behind us. What could I do?

"It was some Kurdish dialect," the young man was saying.

"I'm certain sure it was bad language," the prettiest of the girls replied in accents of awed delight. "It sounded soft and spitty at the same time, and I've heard that nothing but swearing will make an Oriental hustle round quick. I wonder who she is, anyhow. The perfectly exquisite fair girl and the prim lady were British for sure; but she looked like a Greek, or perhaps Irish."

"It happens I can satisfy your thirst for information, Cousin May," the man replied. "She is Eurasian."

They were probably speaking of some one else; in any case, the remarks of an underbred Yankee tourist were of no moment to me. All the same a hot wave crept over my cheeks.

"My! How romantic!" cried Cousin May.

The others squawked with equal rapture. "How do you know, Cousin Harvey?" asked one.

"She was pointed out to me by the dragoman—I wonder where he has absquatulated to, by the way—he could not remember her name, but knew her father is an Englishman and her mother some kind of a nigger."

A nigger? The miniature, painted as a tribute of infatuation by the Expedition draughtsman in '70, burnt against my skin inside my bodice.

"Why, she looked quite a lady," the youngest girl exclaimed. "I wonder what she's like at home?"

"Who knows? Quite a lady, perhaps," the man replied pleasantly. "Perhaps—for I distrust half-breeds; the civilised veneer is generally only skin-deep. You never know what games they may be up to."

"P'raps she's a cannibal in private life, and goes on all fours, and smokes a chibouque," Cousin May giggled.

The youngest girl was more charitable. "'Tanyrate, she was just lovely," she decreed. "Her voice was so sweet, and refined too——"

"And her piebald hair? I trust that is sweet and refined too?" the man put in. My face could go no hotter.

"Oh, I thought the albino lock just cute!" replied the youngest girl.

"I grant there is no fault to be found with our fair—if flamboyant—unknown's looks," the man conceded graciously. "My objections to her are simply founded on belief in the dictum that Heaven made the white man and the black, but not the Eurasian, and an ingrained personal prejudice against yellow gals——"

At that hideous moment Evelyn laughed. The speaker glanced over his shoulder, caught my tell-tale eye, and had the belated grace to go red. Men never blush, they simply go red in the face. I kept his eye for a moment with the blankest stare I could compass. He hurriedly steered his party to the opposite side of the street.

"Hullo, what's the matter with you, child?" asked Papa, peering up at me suddenly.

"Nothing," I replied.

"'Nothing' in that tone, means a lot," he commented. "Why, you are as pink as a pomegranate!"

"And you don't blush easily, you know!" Mrs. Kent added with friendly candour.

"I'm tired," I said evasively.

"I believe she's hungry," said Evelyn in an impersonal tone. "I am. I presume, dad, there is not time enough before supper to run round to Abdullah's and have her picture took before the blush is quite gone?"

"I think she's suffering from a tardy attack of remorse for having let you go to that show," he suggested.

"Amen!" agreed Evelyn. When we were unwrapping in our dressing-room a little later she turned on me suddenly.

"Why did you take me there?" she demanded.

"From policy," I answered steadily. "I saw you were acquiring too rosy an idea of the East, so I gave you a glimpse of the fanaticism hidden under the veneer."

"But why? Why?"

"Because I know the East, and I have known girls fresh from the West who would not listen to old residents——"

"I have been taught to listen to my elders," she interrupted.

"I know. But obeying them is another matter." I dropped my acid tone for one of earnestness. "The East is not wholly populated by obsequious servants, obliging Sultans, well-bred harem ladies, and agreeable *aides*, Evelyn. When we are three Europeans alone amidst numberless fanatics of the kind I have shown you to-night will you try and obey me, and try to believe I know the best?"

"I will," she promised frankly. Still, a little doubtful look was in her tell-tale English eyes. "You seem to have rather ugly ideas of impressing a lesson at times, Rathia," she added.

BOOK II

IN HARRIED KURDISTAN

Chapter I

THE AUTUMN RISING

AT Trebizond Miksi Gauriel awaited us, with all ready for a rapid march to Van. The Miksi is Papa's right-hand man-of-all-work; in everything, from valeting to archæological superintendence, he is known all about the Two Great Rivers as "Miksi Kara," the Black Pilgrim, from the tint of his moustache and the bush of little tight plaits that adorns his neck and shoulders. Kara is black, and Miksi a title bestowed on Christians who have visited the Sepulchre, as Moslems are Hajjis after they have heard the Khutbeh on Arafat.

I do not remember life without Miksi Gauriel's dyed plaits somewhere in sight. In England he was taken for a Bashi Bazouk of the most ferocious type, indeed, with his Robinson Crusoe hat surmounting falcon-like features, his jaunty foal's-hair jacket, peg-top trousers stuffed into high boots, and belt tightened out with a small armoury, the old fellow looks like anything but what he is. And he is a Deacon of the Chaldæan Church, the oldest communion of Christendom, founded by the Magi on their return from Bethlehem.

By order he had bought an excellent Kurdish mount for Evelyn, and had also in readiness the proper complement of riding and baggage mules, two zaptiehs for escort, Papa's fiddle-headed Kermanshah roan, and my bay mare Arjamand. Arjamand is the neatest little Hajin that was ever trotted about Mosul market

with a pedigree from Kubleh the half-divine tied to her silken mane.

We reached Van sans accidents, by way of Erzeroum. It is not the easiest of roads, but Evelyn came out admirably. She was her mother over again in more than looks, heat and cold as the road led up or down, rough quarters, trying fellow-travellers—she positively enjoyed it all. Even when we were stranded at a roofless Seljouk caravanserai, where a lovely tomb with Cufic inscriptions across the way and a brace of stone lions to the doorposts did not, to my mind, compensate for the drawback of the servants being lost with the luggage, and we had to retire supperless to an adamantine couch of one blanket and a horse-cloth, her sole comment was: "To think of the years I have wasted in England!"

So we came to Van, and the European residents rejoiced. In those days they sometimes did not see a white stranger for two years at a stretch. As we wished to excavate a mound some miles to S.W., we set up headquarters at Vastan, on the shore of Lake Van. There Evelyn and I spent most of our time, entertaining guests from Van and all around while Papa attended to the work.

The Kents stayed with us for a week, and took Evelyn back to Kharlis with them. We were to start for Mosul in a short time; the arrangement was that we would wire and Mr. Kent would take her to meet us at Kochma, a town on the main road a day's journey from Kharlis. That is how the Autumn Rising found us separated.

In autumn the nomad Kurds move from their hill quarters to winter stations in the plains, and as they move they leave a trail of robbery and murder. At this season, furthermore, the sedentary tribes indulge in little outbursts of animal spirits: tribal fights and some slaying of tax-gatherers and native Christians.

We stayed too long over our work, the mound was in a sheltered valley, and we were tempted to linger until snow was reported from the mountains and the news grew ominous. My kinsmen on the distaff side had been discreetly well-behaved for a time. They had been letting the sheep's wool grow, as they facetiously put it: letting the Christian villagers get in the crops and scrape together a little money before robbing them; now the annual rows began. They were unexpectedly bad that year; half the Artousha were up, the unspeakable Herki were worse than usual, the Dikrans were restive, finally the Gadarwand in the vicinity of Kharlis showed signs of breaking out. At this we were alarmed, sent the Stamboul Museum's share of the spoil to Van, disbanded the labourers, and started for Mosul, leaving the heavy baggage to follow later.

Vastan, Kharlis, and Kochma stand at the angles of an irregular triangle, Vastan twice as far distant from each of the others as they are from one another. We would have two days' journey to Kochma, and Evelyn one to meet us there. Near Kochma several roads meet, that from Vastan, one from Diabekr, one leading to Mosul via Sart and Amadiyeh, and the main artery running northwardly to Erzeroum. It is near the Erzeroum road that Kharlis stands.

On the Monday we wired that Evelyn was to meet us at Kochma by Wednesday. The answer came promptly:

"Meant to bring E. to Kochma anyhow; things ugly here. Kent."

We only contrived to do ten miles by night as, starting in haste, we had contrived to hire a clumsy set of katirgis. By Tuesday noon we made a midday halt at a village which was the last telegraph station before Kochma, and wired again.

After effort, the Lazè operator pulled his greasy plaits helplessly. Something was wrong with the North wire. Further work elicited this, from Kochma :

“Kharlis wire cut last night, town isolated ; sending troops. Raouf Pasha.”

Something terrible had happened at Kharlis, and Evelyn was there.

Again we wired for details. This is what we learnt :

“Gadarwand risen, hold approaches to Kharlis. Troops will be here, Allah willing, and the roads serving, in a week. Raouf Pasha.”

Things may happen in a week. That day we got no further on. A wayfarer from Kochma brought ill news of the road. It passes over hills, and there, he said, the snow was nearly deep enough for Truce of Allah.

The katirgis went on strike. “Ya Effendim !” they wailed, “y’Allah, our fine mules will be frozen, ourselves we will die of cold, our children will be orphans, the mothers of our children——”

And much to the same effect for three mortal hours, while Papa remonstrated with his tongue and the zap-tiehs with the flat of their sabres. Only an answer to our wired appeal from the Vali of Van awed them ; they agreed to go on. Unfortunately, by that time the early dark had closed in, and, as they had unloaded the mules at the start of the trouble, the baggage was in hopeless confusion. We were stranded for the night.

Very dismally we left the office for the walnut plantation where our tents were pitched. “We must make up the delay by hard riding,” Papa decreed. “Hey, Miksi ?”

Our Deacon had just returned from a foraging expedition. “No chicken-fowls to be got, Agha,” he announced cheerfully. “But we found this boy-lad lying by the

roadside along-beside a dead nag—horse. It will perhaps fill the dull evening for Rathia Khatoun to make it easy for him while he dies—slips the painter. You are so fond-in love of dying folk, Rathia Khatoun.”

He presented an Armenian lad of fifteen or so, slung sack-wise on a mule and in a state of collapse. “Wealth of God and Head of Mar Shimoun!” he added in simple wonder, after I had tended the new arrival and found him likely to survive. “What trouble-bother you give yourself over that boy, Khatoun Effen’! You give him of Sir Horne Effen’s whisky and your own Cologne-Eau de scent. Frankish ladies are such odd ladies. Why do you do it?”

“It serves to kill a leisure hour,” I returned. Then the patient began to recover.

He was from Kharlis. It appeared that, first of all, a band of Gadarwand attacked an Armenian village near by and drove off the sheep. The Christians did an unusual thing: they retrieved the spoil with much loss on both sides. The raiders fled, vowing to return in force and sack every village in the district. In despair the villagers took refuge in the Kharlis Mission with what was left of their flocks.

Kharlis itself is the head townlet of a nahie, away in the wilds and separated from the main road by a tangle of mountains. The mission buildings stand on a hill without the wall, and the space within its walls is large enough to accommodate more than the present fugitives. The Kurds came and laid a regular siege to it, secure in the knowledge that, owing to the state of the roads from Diabekr, the only quarter from whence it could come, help would not arrive for some time.

The Mudir of Kharlis could do nothing; he had only ten of the three hundred redifs who were supposed to garrison the place. The Kurds did not attempt to harm any one in the Moslem townlet; they did not fear any

future trouble with the Government so long as they left Moslems and the military alone and did not raise international trouble by molesting Europeans. On this understanding the authorities had a tacit understanding with them. Pursuant to it the Gadarwands promised Mr. Kent that all Europeans and their belongings would be respected if he would turn out the villagers. The missionary then double-barred the gates and wired to Diabekr.

So matters stood when our informant left. He had seen Evelyn helping Mrs. Kent with the fugitive women and children. Though there was no fear she would come to personal harm, it was horrible to imagine the girl witnessing what would ensue on the Kurds' inevitable victory.

The boy had ridden the sixty odd miles from the place in a day and night, with some rest as he hid in a wood from scouting Kurds. He was too weak to walk when his horse fell dead from exhaustion. His object was to beg help from Van. We told him it would be of no use; Kharlis was in the Vilayat of Diabekr, and help was to be expected in a week.

"In a week!" he returned. "In a week they will find the bodies fresher than they would if they came in a year, nothing more! And my father and my mother are there!"

He sobbed passionately. Papa sat on a mule trunk, I sat on another, Miksi loafed respectfully in the doorway, and we looked at him like Job's comforters. Questioned, presently, he detailed his own escape. The enemy held three sides of the town, about the north they did not trouble, as it was hemmed in by mountains, and from this side he had escaped by a narrow track, a wild-goat affair utterly useless as a road for help, under cover of dim starlight.

"That track-way is known to me-myself," Miksi

volunteered, "It runs round the mountain and hard S.E. to a village called Mouschat, then it twists to join the summer track we are on fifteen miles farther on. It is easily snowed up, and is only fit for good riders riding light."

He traced the track on the map for us. "Kent Agha desired me to tell you, Khanoum, that he will try to get the young Khanoum your sister to Kochma at the appointed date," the messenger went on. "He will send her by the road I took; she will have to come to the junction with this road."

"Wait a bit," said Papa. "There's a branch road from Mouschat to Kochma; she will get to Kochma by that in a day's moderate journeying."

"Agha, there was a cloud-burst yesterday, and that road is flooded to a man's height."

"It may be passable by Wednesday."

"If Allah wills, Effendim; but I do not think He will do so."

It was a toss-up whether Evelyn would get to Kochma in a day, or come our way. Of course, if she came our way she would expect to meet us within the day. I thought we had better split the caravan in two, one half to go straight to Kochma, the other to travel via Mouschat. We arranged finally that Papa would ride to Mouschat with one zaptieh while I led the rest of the party by the safe road to Kochma.

Meanwhile, the messenger had been musing. "Help from Diabekr!" he muttered. "It would have been of as much use to go to Ischaryar Beg."

"Ischaryar Beg, my child?" asked Papa.

"Ischaryar Beg, who lives at Kalmaru on the top of a mountain, Effendim."

Ischaryar of Kalmaru? The world is small. "There is blood between his tribe and the Gadarwand," the Armenian proceeded. "It may be, if one spoke to him

with eloquent words, he might help Kharlis. But it is too late now."

I asked why he did not go to Kalmaru in the first instance.

"Khanoum Effen', the Beg's Diz is enclosed by high hills, only one way leads to it from Kharlis, the Crooked Cleft, and, hoping for aid from Van, I did not try it."

"The Beg would be of no use-aid, Rathia Khatoun," chimed in Miksi. "He is now a Hamidieh Yozbashi, and dare not attack the Gadawands for fear it be said he favours Christians."

We dismissed Ischaryar from consideration, and arranged for a very early morning start.

Chapter II

A DAMSEL ERRANT

LATE in the evening Papa went round to see that all was secure. Within half an hour Miksi and another servant carried him back badly lamed. Arjamand had just launched out with her wicked little hind-hoofs for fun. The poor man's left knee was *hors de combat*—nothing serious, but he would not be able to face mountain tracks for a day or two. The Mouschat project was knocked on the head; he decreed that we were all to pursue the safe way to Kochma, and spent the rest of the evening in proving to me, to his own satisfaction, that Mr. Kent would send on Evelyn by the direct way, cloudburst or no cloudburst.

“And if she has to wait at Kochma it will not matter,” he concluded. “I’ve told you often what a good friend of mine the old Kaimakam there is.”

That night I dreamt. I dreamt I was standing in the middle of the Ardosht mountains; there was mist all around and from the mist voices cried in a wailing chorus, calling to me, calling, calling. I could not distinguish words, but the appeal of it was heart-rending. Then the mist split a little and, afar off, I saw Evelyn. She was standing dressed in white, and as I looked at her a black band, a stain of shadow, slowly began to spread down her figure from her left shoulder to her right foot. She did not seem to be aware of it, but as the stain grew darker the inarticulate wailing around her grew louder,

and suddenly a small voice was speaking in my ear. It was the voice of my step-mother. "Rathia!" it wailed in anguish, "Take away the stain—you can! It will break her heart if she sees it—and it will break mine in Heaven—and I did not treat you badly, Rathia!"

Then I stretched out my hand, and whenever I touched the stain it faded. I was anxious—so anxious—to remove it; but whenever I put forth my arm it was clutched and restrained by something invisible, and now the voices became articulate, voices of women and children crying together:

"Khanoum! For sake of Mart Maryam! In the name of your mother, for the God of Pity's sake! Y' Sliwa 'Isa, death, and more than death, for all of us! And we are so many! Rathia, daughter of the English and the Abbassides, shall one or many suffer?"

"Rathia, Rathia, my little girl—your sister!" cried the voice in my ear.

"Khanoum, for 'Isa's sake!" wailed the chorus.

"What can I do?" I cried in despair.

At my words an arm crept out of the mist. It was a woman's, bare, ivory-tinted, the hand exquisitely made, with a great Meccan turquoise on the little finger. It touched the stain.

I woke with icy drops running down my face. Shivering, I rose, wrapped myself in a fur cloak, and slipped out of the tent. The night-light showed Sulti fast asleep, the sentries at the tent-flap took no heed of my exit beyond saluting me.

And outside in the dusk and chill the chorus of my dreams still rang in my ears, and it came from north-west—from Kharlis.

When we encamp it is Miksi's custom to go the rounds frequently at night. I waited under a tree until he came along, looking sharply at each sentry and nursing his musket, an article that was out of date when he bought

it from a Kurdish crusader in '78, and broached my proposal.

He refused flatly. Luckily for me, even a soul sanctified by pilgrimage to the Sepulchre is but mortal when a woman under thirty makes eyes in moonlight and wheedles in the bottom note of her voice.

"Sir Horne Agha will turn me off if I do it," he hesitated.

"Not if I speak for you," I returned. "And if you don't I will never forgive you. And that will be so uncomfortable for you, Miksi Shamasha. I tell you, I hear voices calling me."

He writhed in uncertainty. "Wind-blow in the trees, Effen'."

"Kim belir, Miksi? Look thou, the wind is from the east; lick a finger and see; but I hear my voices from the west."

His knowledge of acoustics was not equal to the phenomenon, and his unexpressed belief in my Second Sight was. "At four, then," I concluded.

The knack of waking at any time you set yourself is a blessing. At half past three I was busy writing:

'About 3.30, September —, 189-.

"DEAR DAD,

"I have decided to meet Evelyn at Mouschat. Sulti can look after you. I would advise you to go straight on to Kochma, as I will, if possible, proceed there by the branch road. If it is not feasible I will return to the junction of the roads and follow you. Perhaps it would be best for you to leave Hajji Izzett and a couple of servants here while you go on. You will comprehend that, with the start I have, it will be useless to send after me

"Best love; you will forgive me a few days hence.

"Your afft. and sometimes dutiful daughter,

"RATHIA JERNINGHAM."

Sulti slept like the Ephesian septet. I felt Providence was on my side. The homeopathic drug-case and the family *buyuruldi* went into my pockets. Papa could do without them better than I could. Slinging a hooded sheepskin coat over my shoulder, I stepped out.

Winter had set in early that year in the highlands. It was bitterly cold; the country, lying in the hushed, breathy stillness of the turn of night, was vast and shadowy under its roofing of translucent grey sky and glittering stars. The camp was still, and Miksi had considerably refrained from waking my two sentries. I pinned the note to Papa's tent-flap and adjourned to the stable.

Miksi awaited me near at hand, wrapped up to the eyes and bumpy with the provender he had annexed by my orders. In the walnut grove was a little hut where the *loupe*-gatherers sheltered in the working season; it served as temporary stables, and Hajji Izzett was on guard there. We foresaw that the real tussle would be with him.

Hajji Izzett is our head groom; he was at the time suffering from a delusion that the Autumn Rising was organised solely as prelude to the stealing of my Arjamand. Arjamand was of koehelain blood on the distaff side—blood of Kubleh, no less, with a pedigree down to Solomon's stud. Kubleh, you may not know, was the *Reine des reines* amongst Arab mares; she could run down the wild ass, so vouch the camp-fire tales of Between the Rivers tribes, and the Arabs of El Jezireh date their chronology by the Era of Kubleh, the Year One being that of her death, A.D. 1836.

At the stable-door the Hajji was to be discerned, in the form of a heap of sheepskins, two brilliant eyes, and a gun-barrel. We hailed him discreetly from behind a tree before we came within the firing line to proffer a request for Arjamand and Papa's Kermanshahi.

He refused flatly. I discoursed for two minutes and set his hoary eyebrows and orange-dyed beard a-bristle with indecision. Finally, when I counted over the times I had ridden on his shoulders, a decade or so in the past——

“Allahu Akhbar!” he ejaculated. “God is Most Great, and it is written on my forehead! Effen’, if the virtuous Miksi Gauriel will smite me on the head with force enough to raise a lump, and then bind me, it would—Inshallah!—save my place.”

“Khatoun Effen’, if you condescend to compel me at the point of your revolver-pistol to smite and bind the excellent Hajji Izzett it would—please Allah!—save my place,” Miksi supplemented.

It was like the *post-contretemps* scene in Eden. I agreed to fill the rôle of Serpent. With the muzzle of my seven-shot near his head, Miksi fulfilled the first part of his task with a whip-stock and much joyousness.

“Y’Allah!” protested Hajji Izzett from the ground, tenderly feeling his head. “Truly, brother, a lighter blow would have sufficed.”

“Truly, brother, the larger the bump the more secure thy place,” the other plotter rejoined.

And the Jerusalem pilgrim trussed up the Mecca pilgrim while I saddled Arjamand. We gagged the Hajji, put a rug over him, and slipped away in safety. Guards were set at other sides of the camp, but what needed other watchers where Hajji Izzett was posted? We skulked amongst the trees until they ended, then Miksi gave me a knee up and the Adventure had begun.

Chapter III

IN THE CHILLY EAST

BEFORE I had felt the ghost of a qualm, once mounted, with Arjamand palpitating through her fiery length as she laid herself along the ground rhythmically and the night wind, all vocal with soundless melody, lapping my cheeks, all was plain. It was my duty to go to Evelyn, and it had been so ordained ere ever the world began.

Without speaking we galloped through the singing starlight. Our business was to ride hard. We rode Orion and the Pleiades across the heavens, we rode them below the horizon, we rode all the stars into the ante-dawn darkness, and we rode the gold and carmine sunrise up the sky.

“Good riding-equitation, Rathia Khatoun!” gloated Miksi, to the tune of the roan’s hoof-beats in the rear. “Who could catch us after this start-lead? Not Kubleh’s self!”

Day came; for a while the track ran up and down, over promontories and along the shore by the lake. The lake stretched out, almost incandescent blue in the rising light; far to west Nimroud Dagh shot up, dazzling turquoise against a sky of rose; eastward Varan Dagh frowned shadowy before the sunrise. The first golden bars streamed down the clefts in its violet mass, showing the villages and monasteries dotted in them as flecks of white. Across the lake Sippan Dagh

glowered, dim and cloud-capped; to south stretched the heights of Ardost, crested with unthawing snow.

In Kurdistan you understand why all people put the lovely Mother Home of Mankind—Eden, Airyanem Vaega, what you will—amidst hills.

Now we crunched through the white line of salt that divides the lake's blue from the brown-weeded bank, now topped a height and had a toy world at our feet. It was bitterly, crisply cold; at first we were on the regular track, but it was solitary at that time of day—silent, too, but for the long whi-r-r when a belated flock of flamingoes hurtled flapping over the water, or the dreary “Honk, honk!” of wild geese streaming across the middle blue. As we splashed through the pink mud on the shore we could see through the water, however deep, the pebbles at the bottom and the little fishes swimming over them. From the banks ducks peeped at us through the weeds; on the marge pelicans and cormorants went on with their scooping and stabbing for fish, all undisturbed by our passing.

About seven we struck off the road at an acute angle, and, after two hours' scramble through hock-high ferns and under scrubby, stunted oaks, found we were riding on the roofs of an Armenian hamlet, a miserable little collection of hovels half hollowed in the slope of a hill. There we stopped to rest the horses.

At the noise of our coming the people tumbled up out of their poor homes, like rabbits out of a warren. My toilette was a little nondescript, including a sheepskin coat to the heels, a fez, and pagri, they took me for some new-fangled kind of Su Bashi, and Miksi's explanation of my identity puzzled them. They had never heard before of such a thing as an Englishwoman, but were reassured to learn that I was a professing Christian and intended to pay for the provisions he requested. Miksi told me he would not be surprised to learn that

grandeos on tour in that district kept up the old Turkish custom of charging for wear and tear of their teeth over the food they demanded.

We stopped an hour, the horses were fed, I rested on a bench outside the hut of the Rayis, breakfasted on blanket bread with a great deal of millstone in it, listened to piteous tales which the tellers wanted me to convey to that one hope of Christians in Kurdistan at the time—the nearest British Consul, and dispensed from the drug-case until it was time to start again.

After sunrise the morning had turned dull and lowering, as we set off again, S.S.W. this time, with Ardost sinking behind us, storm-clouds brushed up in murky ribbons, whirling together until they were bunched into a solid mass torn at intervals by blue lightning, with a sickly, transparent flood of green below down to the horizon. We were ascending now; as we rose the mercury in my thermometer charm sank. Luckily we outrode the coming storm, and from the top of a spur jutting from the mountains for which we were now bound looked back at the tempest breaking in the lowlands behind us. Ascending a following spur we could see the western heights on the horizon in front, all tender white flecked with grey shadows. Behind them Kharlis lay, at the top of a high mount before and to the right of us Miksi pointed out a warped, perpendicular shadow.

“The Crooked Cleft leading to Diz Kalmaru, Khatoun,” he said.

From this I made out that Diz Kalmaru was situated in the crater of an extinct volcano, and only to be reached through a crack in the rim. It appeared quite near, but that was an optical delusion; between us and it lay a table-land many miles across, grey with half-frozen mud, and flecked here and there with a white rag of snow, and the bridle-path hillwards faded into

nebulous white before the eye could trace its full length.

The descent of that promontory was difficult. The path was steep, a narrow mule-track cut into a series of terraces, each from four to six feet high and slippery with frost. Sheer, snow-topped walls of rock soared up at either hand.

"If more snow falls to-morrow we will not be able to get back to the Vastan track," croaked Miksi.

It was obvious. At first we dismounted and tried to get the horses down by coaxing. After we had spent an hour at it and had descended five terraces, I mounted again, in exasperation, and spurred Arjamand down. She took it in a rush, just clicking a brace of hoofs, goat-like, on each terrace, while I lay back, my shoulders nearly on her tail, enjoying it hugely. We landed safely at the base in moderately firm mud, Miksi declined to follow leader, I raged at the base while he climbed down, and so it was late before we resumed our way.

Two more hours' canter was all we could screw out of the animals. Wearied with the heavy roads, they made but poor progress through the viscid, thinly iced mud, though they made a brave show over it and splashed us to the waist. A frosty, cloudy evening found us still floundering dismally over the lonely plateau. To add to our joy, a torrential rain began to fall, turning soon to thick sleet and blocking out all view a couple of yards off.

"We will get to Mouschat s-s-some t-t-t-time-hour, Khatoun, if we are n-not f-f-f-frozen first," said Miksi, with chattering teeth.

The sleet changed to snow later; my hands were almost too numbed to hold the bridle. But this brought compensation. We could see farther, and soon espied a large hut, half buried in the snow, and a clutter of smaller ones beyond.

This was Mouschat. My scalp crept. News at least of Evelyn might wait there. We turned in the low gateway of an enclosing wall, crossed a dirty court, and alighted. Miksi led the mounts; I shouldered open a crazy door, and we waded into pandemonium.

Chapter IV.

A SUSPICIOUS CHARACTER

It was a subdued kind of pandemonium, loudest in the middle of the cavernous hall, thinning out round the walls, where the cows stood in rows munching placidly; their mild eyes shining in the flickering light. Horses stamped on the mud floor and shook their headstalls, the sheep massed at the far end of the apartment bleated fitfully, a diapason of talking, groans, and the splutter of green wood backed all.

Odahs are invariably built on the same plan: one large room, a clay platform for aristocratic guests, and the common fire, the rest of the floor free to humbler wayfarers, their mounts, and the village live-stock. My eyes, fresh from the dusk, were dazzled at first by the dancing light and the billows of smoke that bore it company; not until we had tethered the animals to one of the unbarked tree-trunks that supported the roof could I see to make my way to the fire. *En route* I skirted many prostrate bundles of cloth which were littered over the floor. They moaned when I stumbled against them. The matter was: a large party of conscripts, bound for Kochma under escort of a few redifs, had been forced to turn back that day owing to the state of the roads; now half of them were down with chills, fever, or frost-bitten hands and feet. Bitter cold had set in with a snap that day, and the poor fellows were badly clothed and fed. Some of the

healthier ones and the redifs were doing what they could, in their clumsy way, to help the others ; the more selfish cowered over the fire with the rest of the guests. The feminine element was represented by a few veiled women in a cold corner.

All were so absorbed in pain, kindness, or apathy, that my cheeky usurpation of a place by the fire was scarcely noticed. There several people mentioned that I was the firstborn son of a noseless she-pig, and hoped Allah would make my countenance cold, otherwise no notice was bestowed on me. In a voice so disguised by the pagri muffled round my face that it startled me, I intoned the customary greeting and bade Miksi call the Khanji.

He was a Christian, and answered trembling. Yea, verily, the tracks to Kochma and Kharlis joined near-by, so please my lordship. But, might it please me, the one to Kochma was flooded and the one to Kharlis held by the Gadarwands.

"Pek ala," said I. Then people trying to get to Kochma must needs turn back, it appeared. To his knowledge had a Feringhi woman passed thereabouts that day ?

His gape was answer enough before he assured me that people unable to get to Kochma had been coming in all day, and none had brought news of the singular apparition my lordship described.

Query : was Evelyn still at Kharlis, or lost in the track ? I thought it over seriously as I drew off my gloves with my teeth.

Now the Yozbashi in charge of the party was on the dais, preparing, for lack of knowledge to do anything better, to drown painful sights and sounds with the aid of a bottle having a slip inscribed : "Physic for Pain in the Head," in Turkish pasted over the original Irish Whisky label. He had not yet got the cork out, and

came over, perfectly sober, a stolid, pleasant-faced, elderly man.

"Salamu 'alai koum!" he said. "Where gottest thou those hands of such delicacy, brother?"

"To thee be peace, likewise," I returned. "Hands? Where I got the rest of myself, I presume. Hands and all things come from Allah," and I flung off my coat and pagri.

"A woman!" he exclaimed.

"An English Khanoum, Bimbashi," I answered. "In its appointed time I will explain my business. Meanwhile, what ails this?"

With a boot toe I indicated a sobbing, writhing heap. Learning that the poor wretch was frost-bitten and had been stuck near the fire for treatment, I set to work, after ordering Miksi and the Khanji to send messengers along the tracks with inquiries. The apparition of a European lady had a usefully galvanic effect on the company; even the invalids who were not yet delirious left off screaming to stare. Some willing helpers I sent out for snow, others were set to massaging, the Yozbashi's whisky was seized for hospital use. It was not possible to start from the place before the searchers returned, and the time might as well be filled in profitably.

Doctoring is absorbing work, I did not remember that I had been riding all day until the last dose and rug were attended to. The Yozbashi had attended me all the while, in a state of polite bewilderment; he now established me on a throne of rugs by the fire and invited me to share his supper of clotted cream, pillau, blanket bread, good fowl, indifferent tea flavoured with tamarind, and rank Cappadocian cigarettes. Over it I told my story and handed him the necessary papers.

He spelt over the documents and looked flurried. "But, Rathia Jernigan Khanoum, such a mad pro-

ceeding! Your sister is not here: did you not foresee the possibility?"

"Truly I did, Yozbashi Effen'."

"And what do you propose to do now, Effen'?"

"Ride on to Kharlis."

"Subhan 'llah! Snow has fallen in the region to the north all day—chok! chok! The track will be blocked."

"The more reason I should adventure it, lest my sister be in difficulties."

"I do not believe that the discreet Kent Effen'di would send a young maiden forth that way," he objected.

Here the messenger returned. No news of Evelyn, and a hard snow-storm. I stood up. "Khanji, I need lanterns, also a bold man who knoweth every stone of the track to Kharlis. I will give very good bakshish."

"This is madness," the Yozbashi protested. "Your hour's rest was spent in aiding us; your horse is weary."

"If I helped you, Yozbashi Effen', help me now."

"Effen', be reasonable!" he implored, "I am certain your sister has not left Kharlis. I will send a messenger, and in the morning you can proceed to Kochma with us."

"You could not get there to-day, Yozbashi?"

"Mash'llah, if He sends the frost to-night again the flood on the road will bear our weight to-morrow. This village is within the Kaza of Kochma——"

In a flash all was clear. For all my credentials, I was a suspicious character. "Yozbashi Effen', is it in thy mind that I lie?" I demanded. "Perhaps thou also disbelievest that I have a sister?"

By token of the loudness of his denial I had hit the nail squarely.

"No, no!" he asserted. "It is known to me that Frankish ladies do wonderful things. Does not one from the Kharlis Mission wander over all the Kharlis hills and Rahwan plain by herself, as you are doing, and

live in Odahs, as you are doing? But her purpose is evident to the eyes of uttermost stupidity: it is to teach the native Naisri, and your purpose—I am a man under authority, although, myself, I believe your story, there be many Hintchak sons of burnt fathers going to and fro in the regions round about urging the followers of Nebbi 'Isa Ibn Maryam to rise against Islam. It is well known the Chaldæans and Armenians are arming in secret. I will eat the bread of disgrace and drink the water of dishonour if I do not give you the chance to verify your words at Kochma."

I was never so insulted in my life. Actually I was under suspicion of being an Armenian Revolutionary Committee propagandist! I did not blame the man himself, but he quailed at the wrath in my voice as I replied, after a moment's meditation on the pickle I was in.

"I am Rathia Jerningham Khanoum," I pronounced. "I am a great Khanoum of the Court of Frankistan; I have kissed the hands of the Sultana Victoria of Frankistan, she who conquered Hindostan before thou or I were born, O Yozbashi; I have shaken the hand of her son the Vali-Ahd Sultan of Walesistan. My father is Horne Jerningham Pasha, a mighty Pasha who sits in the presence of the Grand Vizier Gladstone. The father of my late step-mother, the mother of my sister, is a Pasha of the first rank——"

Here blows on the outer door drowned my fulminating, and sent the Khanji to see who knocked so late.

"This, by grace of Allah, is Mouschat, Kochma is four hours farther on; the road, by Allah's mercy, is deeply flooded, O my brother," I heard him say.

"You hear, Effen'?" said a second voice.

"Four hours!" sighed a third.

Within the minute I was outside the door. The faint glow from the doorway revealed two muffled figures holding horses, beyond a third steed with a rider

on it. The rider was muffled, too; fez, furs, and pagri only allowed a pair of eyes to be seen. But all Kurdistan could not show another such pair of flickering sapphires.

"Evelyn!" I cried.

"On the spot, as usual!" She gave a little laugh that tailed into almost a whimper, kicked away the stirrup, and slid down into my arms.

She was fairly worn out. I almost carried her in to the daïs. "My sister, Yozbashi," I said. "Wilt believe me now? Though indeed, I do not care if you hale me to Kochma now, so long as she comes too."

At this point the dear girl found her voice. "Rathia the nizam, will they come?" was her first remark.

"Yes, from Diarbekr, my dear," I replied soothingly.

"Oh, I am glad!" she sighed. "We feared—the poor villagers! One woman had lost both her daughters last year, one of my age, one only ten; she told me. But Mrs. Kent was angry with her for telling me."

It occurred to me that I had given her, by chance, unduly rosy ideas of the relief prospects, but it would not do to undeceive her at present; she was used up. "You must not talk any more now," I said.

"All right. Where's dad?"

"I came alone to meet you. I'll explain later."

She nodded, and, after pulling the yellow pup, very fresh and lively after a cosy day, out of a coat-pocket, lay back limply and stared at the fire while I drew off her gloves. Miksi in the meantime attended to her escort, two of the Kents' oldest servants, one a big yellow-haired Chaldæan from Jelu, the other a Montenegrin who would have been sufficient escort to native Christians amongst the Herki.

From the polite distance along the daïs to which he had retired, the Yozbashi kept an unobtrusive eye on us. The rest of the company peered and gasped at the wonder of the English golden curls and cameo profile

pillowed against my shoulder. A feeling of good-will to all humanity flooded my mind as I realised that my reckless dash had its justification, and more. "Well, Yozbashi Effen', what is thy opinion of my veracity now?" I asked.

"In all truth, Allah Al Aziz my witness, I never presumed to doubt your word, Effen', but the coming of the younger Khanoum places the Seal of Certainty on the Door of Doubt. Now your movements shall be dictated by your desires—Allah willing."

I made the introduction. Veli Yozbashi from Kochma, my sister, Evelyn Jerningham Khanoum. "Indeed, Effen'; you will pardon my caution," said the officer. "This is a time of plotting against Islam and our Lord the Padishah—on whom be blessings from our Lord Moustapha Ahmad, the Seal of Prophecy (bliss attend his beard!). Yea, openly and unafraid, Armenians sing a revolutionary song that declares:

"Go forward, brother Christians, be soldiers faring forth to the battle with the sign of 'Isa leading. 'Isa Himself is going to war; let us rise against our masters.'"

And certainly one must admit that "Onward, Christian Soldiers," is not exactly a discreet hymn for Armenian use.

Chapter V

AN ARMENIAN NIGHT

EVELYN being uncommonly tough, for all her seraphic looks, she was soon herself again, as far as tongue and appetite went, and listened to a résumé of my adventures while she shared a bowl of the national dish—soured milk slabbed with sugar and cracked corn—with the pup.

“I’m glad you came,” she conceded. “In the proper course of things, I should have been at Kochma hours ago, but a snow-storm caught us half-way, we went astray badly, and took twelve hours to get here, instead of the three of Mr. Kent’s calculation.”

“I wonder Mr. Kent let you risk it.”

“Oh, he procured a safe-conduct from the Gadarwand chief. I only came round by the back because the chief could not vouch for his followers if the gate was opened. We were all right; that big Montenegrin orders every one around as he likes. Here, Semiramis!”

Semiramis was the pup. She answered to her name nicely when something to eat was in question, and left off worrying Arjamand to come and bury her head in the bowl. “Oh, I am so glad about the soldiers!” Evelyn resumed. “The town can’t hold out three days; they’ll come—When?”

“As soon as possible,” I replied evasively. “The present pressing question is: where are we to pass the night?”

“The house of the Rayis is, doubtless, the best in the

village," said the Yozbashi, when we referred it to him. Then he issued orders that the headman and his family were to be turned out for our benefit.

"They can herd into another house," I reassured Evelyn, who was a little shocked at the eviction. "Miksi, stay with Evelyn Effen' while I go and inspect."

But, after I had wrapped myself up and sallied out with the Yozbashi and a volunteer guard into the bitter night, we found that the best house would not do at all. For one thing, the sudden cold had not yet killed all the beetles and spiders and etceteras of that description, and they positively dripped off the ceiling, and nearly put out our candles.

Without a word we returned to the Odah; and how stuffy it was now that the ventilation holes had been plugged up with straw corks to make all snug for the night! "Barns in this land are cleaner than houses," I announced.

"Above us is the common granary of the village," said the Khanji. "If ye Effendim do not mind sharing it with the winter stock of grain, it is secure enough."

We explored. The stair leading to the granary was in the corner where the sheep were herded; to reach it we had to step on their fat, flat backs. It was the very place I wanted; the temperature was at the wrong side of zero, it is true, as the four small windows were unglazed, but the door was stout and the atmosphere deliciously fresh after the bakery below, and sweet with the dry, crisp scent of wheat and millet. Miksi scooped a trough in one of the yellow piles and spread it with the only blanket I had brought, and we descended to put Evelyn's mind at rest.

With the aid of her amateurish Turkish she had, during our absence, made friends with the company in general, who snatched a fearful joy in exchanging chit-chat with an unveiled lady. A restful hour on the daïs

followed, punctuated by excursions amongst the sick men. The Yozbashi wished to have a whip-round to furnish us with rugs and cushions, and the patients were eagerly willing; but we preferred to prop ourselves up, back to back—a position that is awkward as an aid to conversation, but ensured ease of mind on the score of the virtue that follows godliness.

Our horses had been fed and groomed. Arjamand had bitten her neighbour on the left, and kicked her neighbour on the right, and was now eating steadily, with the mien of one who has just finished a hard day's work in the cause of charity. Semiramis, very frisky after her journey in Evelyn's jacket, was making herself a nuisance. Sometimes she made overtures to the lean grimalkins attached to the establishment, and was scratched, other times her industrious fat legs carried her little round body over to the cattle, bringing her back in a hurry after she had set a few bad-tempered cows by the horns. Wherever she went she invariably returned with a fresh peccadillo on her soul and took refuge on Veli Yozbashi's feet, to his exceeding discomfort.

Every one talked at once. Crops, raids, trade, and other topics were threshed out, and awed silence attended when Evelyn gave her personal impressions of the Padishah going to Selamlik, the Sultana Victoria of Frankistan holding her Court, and the Vali-Ahd Sultan of Wales shooting on our neighbour's estate.

So, in an atmosphere of bad tobacco and acrid wood-smoke, the guileless hours passed by. At 7.30 the Yozbashi looked at his old turnip watch, and announced, "Salatu 'l Isha, my brethren." Then he slid Semiramis off his boots, drew three fingers over them by way of purification, and made some mystic passes about the exposed parts of his person with the aid of a bowl of water from which the cats had been drinking. The

other Moslems, out of consideration for the temperature, merely passed their forefingers over their ears and told themselves they had encountered nothing defiling since their last ablutions.

Then, under the officer's lead, they all faced the west end of the north wall, where some travelling Mollah had chalked up the information that in that direction Mecca lay, and said the Prayers of the Closing In of Night.

Evelyn had not yet got over the oddness of seeing a mixed company bowing, twisting, and falling flat, in unison, to united chanting. Some of them owned little pats of clay, on which the forehead rested when it was etiquette to grovel; they passed these round at the end for less fortunate folk to kiss.

"Mecca earth, I remember," whispered Evelyn, aside. "Do they possess magic virtue?"

"No, they only make the owners stuck up over the fact that they aren't miserable Christians, like you and me."

"H'm. People in England find it hard to believe there are places where 'Christian' is equivalent to our 'benighted heathen,'" she agreed.

Soon afterwards we retired to our bower. A howling wind had driven away the snow-clouds for a space, the full moon obligingly obviated the dangerous necessity of a candle, and, for crowning luxury, Miksi brought a fair supply of fairly clean water. Ice kept crusting over the top between dips, but a school-boy kind of wash was possible, and that is as much as one can have the face to pray for in Armenia.

"I hope poor Papa is as comfortable to-night as we are," observed Evelyn, as she produced a gilt-edged book. I took it for a Testament, and went about my ablutions on tiptoe until she began to write in it with a fountain-pen.

"My diary," she explained, noting my stare at it over the edge of the towel. "Special paper, three days to a page, two hundred pages, and only weighs five ounces. I've kept it for a year now."

"Then you can surely afford to miss one day," I shuddered with chattering teeth.

"Miss to-day?" she looked grave reproach at me. "The most remarkable day of my life? No, thanks. I can see myself reading it to Diana and Maud and Vic—won't their eyes pop out!"

And she finished her task while I undressed to the extent of unscrewing my spur and putting it under the saddle Arjamand had lent me for pillow. Twice during the ensuing hour I was routed out. The occasions were similar in details: a scurrying of sheep, the voice of Veli Yozbashi bawling from amongst them, and Miksi, who was bivouacking on the stairs, translating through the door.

"Rathia Effen', the Yozbashi-officer says will you please come and speak to a man-soldier who is very ill-sick? Shall I tell him that the rest of a Feringhi lady is of more account-worth than the life of a Moslem?"

Spite of this amiable suggestion and the nearness of the mercury to zero, I descended, and pulled both men round in turn. Both were touchingly grateful, both kissed the muddy hem of my skirt, and the second said he was so very sorry that I was bound to land in Laza, the Big Fire of the Next World, for an infidel. Which was really kind of him, when you think it over.

Within a short space I was again roused, this time by violent tugs at my hair.

"Wake up, do, Rathia!" Evelyn's voice implored. "I am sure there's mice about!"

The wind was screaming round the building; she could only make me hear by applying her lips to my ear. "Very likely," I returned sleepily.

"I think they are eating my boots!" she announced tragically.

"Why don't you kick?" I asked, surprised.

"Kick? I left them under the far window."

"Your boots? Did you actually take them off?"

"Of course. It sounds so horrid to go to bed in your boots. If I'd had to put that in my diary——"

I sat up, intending to tell her that her ideas of gentility would get their toes frost-bitten if she aired them too much in Kurdistan. The words died on my lips.

The four little windows were in the same wall, that on our right, as the granary was half hollowed in the slope of the hill. Through the nearest a bar of moonlight flowed across our knees. Through the second another clear stream came; the third let in no light. A man's head, arms, and shoulders, convulsively agitated, were blocked out in black against the silver beam admitted by the last window.

Owing to the position of the moon the light came in at an acute angle to the wall. As I looked the intruder jerked his head into the shaft of light pertaining to the third window; this revealed a wide turban, aquiline Kurdish features, and prominent eyes. Into the latter I dashed a double handful of millet.

Fine gravel would have been better, but the grain served at a pinch. With a howl of anguish he put his hands to his smarting optics. The hands were empty, a hurried peep through the nearer window revealed to me snow, the tracks of only one set of hoofs in its whiteness, and a horse standing patiently, tail to wind, on a pile of kiziks beneath the third window. From the third window a pair of legs projected, kicking violently. To a discerning eye all was noon-clear: the window was a little smaller inside than it was outside, our intruder had stepped off his horse's back and had drawn himself through half-way, with a jerk, before the powder-horn

and other impedimenta round his waist became jammed. There he was at our mercy, his efforts at release only wedging him more securely, his arms at one side of the wall, his weapons at the other, the intervening space blocked by his ribs.

I waited by the second window with my seven-shot cocked. In a few moments he ceased his rubbing, and, in a dazed fashion, turned a pair of bloodshot eyes to us. The dazed expression turned rapidly to alert amazement, followed by incredulity and terror, and culminating in stark, staring fear.

"*Ista'far'llah!*" he ejaculated. "I am a sinful man, y'Allah, so sinful! And my punishment is as the punishment of Abrahathu 'l Ashram, who dared impiously to lead his warriors, in number as the sands of the sea, riding upon elephants, to the besieging of Mecca in the Year of the Bearing of the Prophet—Bliss attend his beard!"

(The tale runs that Allah sent to defend Mecca such swarms of little birds that when each dropped a beakful of little pebbles on the invaders, men and elephants were alike squashed flat and as full of holes as worm-eaten leaves.)

After another glance he rubbed his eyes again and whimpered on:

"The dirt beneath your feet did not truly intend to break into your pavilion, O Black Eyes! I took it for a Christian granary, and did but mean to fill my forage-bag. Forgive, O Damsel of the Lustrous Orbs, and, I beseech, intercede with Allah for my pardon—is he not 'r Rahmani, 'r Rahim?—and beg the other houri behind to do likewise! In Name of Al Wahhab, 'r Rahmani, 'r Rahim!"

I laughed. "This, my son, is truly a Christian granary. And my sister and I be truly no houris, but Frankish ladies."

He looked vaguely relieved. "Feringhi ladies?" he repeated dubiously. "Ye be not houris?"

"Merely the kind of houris Allah permits Frankish men to wed if they be virtuous and industrious. But we be mortal, and it is cold, so please to go. No reaching for thy weapons, either, or my seven-shot may chance to go off. It will not do so, however, if thou departest peacefully; we have no cause to wish thee ill, and to kill thee or make thee our enemy would consort ill with our convenience."

He explained, dolefully, that he could not reach his weapons, even if he desired to do so, which he did not; also that he would depart if he could, but he couldn't. I thereupon took him by the shoulders and, with a hearty push, sent him out feet first. He slid back with a gasp, I thrust the upper part of my person after him, the pistol well in evidence. He struck the horse's haunches with his chest, bounced, and vanished into the snowdrift that was piled against the fuel-stack.

By dint of clutching a foreleg of the animal he was soon out. "Khanoum, my little bag is still an-hungered," he said coaxingly, with a sly ogle, as he shook the loose snow away.

"I do not rob my fellow-believers," I made prim retort.

"Y'Allah. These people are but Christians, and you are a Frank," he expostulated.

"And I marvel thou darest to break in by thyself," I proceeded.

"Y'Allah, Christians dare not harm a Kurd."

"But the redifs here——" I went on.

"Redifs? Here?" he gasped.

"The information seems to affect thee greatly," I purred.

"I am stupid with my fall," he explained hastily.

"The presence of redifs is of no moment to me, by the Wisdom of Allah."

Wisdom of Allah is a mental-reservation oath, equal to the Five Crosses of the perjuring Irish witness. "Of course," I agreed.

"I am an honest man," he went on. "I live near Akhlat, and am returning there from Kochma."

"How strange!" said I. "At our last news the Kochma road was impassable."

"Did I say Kochma? I meant Vastan," he hastily corrected.

"Pek ala," I returned. "I can answer for my sister, the other houri, we will meet thee for the first time in life to-morrow. Go now; I will shoot at once if my sleep is disturbed again. As salam!"

He touched his knee, breast, and brow with much ceremony. I waited until he had knocked up the Khanji and disappeared indoors before I left the window. Evelyn, curled up in the furs, had evidently much enjoyed the interview. Semiramis, at her feet, had snored peacefully throughout it.

"A useful dog!" I commented.

"She's for ornament alone, like her owner," Evelyn replied. "Rathia, who was your Romeo? You must both be badly smitten to do the Balcony Scene in this temperature. My Zaza was not equal to following the rapid patter, but I caught the words 'Mecca,' 'houri,' and 'redifs.' Who was he?"

"He only wanted to fill his fodder-bag gratis, and is from Vastan bound for Akhlat—according to his own account. If you will kindly stop taking your half of the communal blanket in the middle I'll tell you what he really is."

"Poor old girl!—you do look chilly, slate-blue. Get into bed and tell me who he is: the Sultan in mufti, after the way of your ancestor Haroun Al Raschid?"

"I'm tired of telling you it's *ar Rashed*. Our visitor was a Gadarwand Kurd on a foxing trip. Probably commissioned to find out if help is likely to come from Vastan or Ischaryar of Kalmaru."

"How did you make it out?" she asked. "I'm sure I heard no mention of Kalmaru."

"In the East lying is not a low vice but a high art, my dear. In it our Kurd was not even B.A. let alone M.A. "True art is to conceal art," as you will know if you have studied the 'Common Quotations from the Classics,' at the back of 'Mangnall's Questions.' The man's fibs fairly pushed one another into view."

"Really, Rathia, from your words—don't you think lying wicked?"

"I believe that in Asiatic Turkey the end justifies the means."

"Oh," she returned soberly, and I could see she was shocked.

I shut my eyes and feigned slumber. It was a little too hard to stand implied reproach from her when, if I had not had her safety so much at heart, I would have dared a visit to Kalmaru and an effort to clear the Gadarwands from Kharlis in good time.

Chapter VI

MEANS TO AN END

BLACK frost had set in by morning. The ice on the matutinal bowl of water took some breaking. Miksi made doleful remarks through the door, after depositing the bowl on the stair-top. "You washed yourselves last night, Effendim," he began accusatively.

"We did, Miksi, we distinctly recollect it."

"Now you will wash yourselves again?"

"Inshallah, such is our intention."

"You will be ill-sick. It is not healthy to wash yourself in this country-land. All Armenians say so. What will Sir Horne Agha say to me if you die—kick the bucket?"

"Don't fear, Miksi Shamasha. He will know that you did all you could to check our vicious tendencies. How's the weather?"

"Deep snow, Effen', and the servants of Evelyn Effen' are poorly—laid up."

When we descended the Yozbashi was waiting for us, seated on a sheep. He was primed with the intelligence that the road to Vastan was now blocked. He meant to wait another day, to rest the sick men, before trying to get to Kochma; in the meantime he was sending to inform the Kaimakam of Kochma why he was delayed. "With the frost, please Allah, the road may be passable," he said.

We were breakfasting on the daïs by that time. The

Khanji put his oar into the conversation. "El Kara Khorous, the Phantom Black Cock, was seen this dawn, Effendim," he answered. "It is a sign that much snow will fall and the village be buried. Last year, about this time, the snow came after El Kara Khorous appeared, and we had no word of the outer world for two months, nor, for the same time, had the outer world word of us."

Evelyn looked round and shuddered. The Odah was doubly unattractive by daylight. "We will make an effort to reach Kochma," I decided.

"My messengers shall escort you," said the Yozbashi.

The kindly officer further arranged to bring on Evelyn's invalided escort. While inspecting them and the other sick men I came across my Kurd spy; he looked uneasily defiant until I asked the Khanji in a stage aside who he was.

Veli Yozbashi had been a patient under the Kents' care in his time. He was anxious to oblige any of their friends, and selected our new escort carefully, pitching at last on an elderly Onbashi and a bandy-legged young private named Izzedin.

To these he administered a lecture on our status and importance. The sting was in the tail of it, addressed to the Onbashi. "I give these high-born and distinguished Feringhi ladies into thy charge, Selim Onbashi, my son," he pronounced. "If a hair falls from their heads thou shalt be responsible. Thou shalt neither leave them nor neglect any means of defending them if Allah permits danger to come near them. Thou art a man of my own city, and thy circumstances and the members of thy family are known to me. Swear by the divorce."

And Selim Onbashi swore. The Yozbashi added a clinching warning.

"These be such great ladies, Selim, my son! They belong to the Court of the Sultana Victoria of Frankistan,

and if ill befall them the said Sultana will bid her son the Vali-Ahd Sultan of Walestan bring a great fleet of iron ships across our lake to waste the shores thereof."

Selim Onbashi thereupon looked scared. Indeed, the idea of our elderly Prince of Wales piloting a punitive naval expedition over the inland Sea of Van might have awed a more educated mind.

"I did not mind trusting you in charge of the granary for the night, Effen'," said the Khanji when I paid up.

"And the redifs did not fill their forage-bags without paying while we were there," I replied. I was not going to let a Christian innkeeper think I could not see through him. I went the hospital rounds for the last time, and gave the Yozbashi drugs and instructions. He was overflowing with kindly sentiments, and pressed a flask of whisky on us as a parting attention. On such small pivots does life hinge. If I had used up all the whisky for the patients all life for myself and Evelyn, and Heaven knows how many other souls, would have run a different course to this day, and to its end.

Nefer Moustapha, the Tommy Atkins of Turkey, is no lamb, but we had won the hearts of all by the doctoring. Every one who could stand came outside to speed us with a parting cheer, the curious humming in unison that is known to tourists who have seen the Padishah's Selamlik progress. We kissed our hands in return, and rode forth in a light snowfall.

For an hour, to the point where the tracks for Kharlis, Kochma, and Akhlat joined, we had the spy for company. There he turned north, and we due south along a narrow, solitary way between hills. We presently crunched through the partly frozen flood. It was only shank-deep at first; we rejoiced. Then Selim Onbashi's horse, leading, suddenly vanished into nobody knows how many feet of turgid water, thinly iced.

We hauled out the poor soldier. "The road is full of suchlike holes," said Izzedin.

The hole was deep enough to drown Selim's horse. The frightened creature resisted our efforts to aid it from the other side of the chasm. We stayed until it was a hopeless case, then I put a bullet through its head; the soldiers did not like to waste a Government cartridge. As it was now past noon we were all chilled to the bone. The sun, after some fitful peeps through banked clouds, had vanished for the day, and the falling flakes and the chattering of Selim's teeth outdid one another in dreary effect. I ordered a move back to the Khan.

The Khan stands at the junction of the tracks, a ruined caravanserai of Seljouk construction, a roofless complex of fine courts and chambers, picturesque but draughty. One room had a scrap of roof, in it the Khanji lived in summer, when caravans from Persia passed that way and could find sufficient shelter in walls alone. There Izzedin kindled a fire, we all lunched on bread and eggs and ginger, and I gave Selim a dose of whisky, under the name of medicine.

"We cannot go on," both soldiers declared.

"We cannot go back," shuddered Evelyn. "Snow-bound in the Odah!"

I finally despatched Izzedin and Miksi to see if they could find a way round the flooded part. We sat by the fire and felt too worried to talk. Selim sat at respectful distance in a corner, and held his jaw when necessary. After an hour of waiting I climbed to the top of a ruined wall to look for the truants.

The snow had ceased to fall, though the sky was banked up with heavy clouds. I paced the wall top until it was time to rejoin Evelyn, then the missing pair hove into sight and met me when I descended. There was, so they reported, no way of negotiating the hole.

At the door Evelyn met us, and her face embodied tragedy.

"The poor Onbashi," she gasped. "He is ill—so ill. He looked so poorly after you left us, Rathia, that I dosed him. It was no good; he is insensible now."

With dreadful visions of an overdose of opium in my mind's eye, I hurried in. The Onbashi lay on the floor near the fire, his eyes shut and his worn old face beautified by a childlike smile.

A good sniff was enough to diagnose the case.

"Is—have I hurt him?" faltered Evelyn.

"You can now tell, from analysis of your own present psychological state, what a convicted manslaughterer feels like," I made answer.

"B-but he's breathing," she protested.

"Loud enough to be heard at Orfa," murmured Miksi, sniffing likewise.

Poor Evelyn looked from me to Miksi. The diaconal features were wreathed in a grin. "He is dead-killed, as Rathia Khatoun said, Effen'," the good man hastened to reassure her. "He is dead—intoxicated-drunk."

"I only gave him a little whisky," she demurred.

"A little was bound to go a long way with a Moslem who has probably never tasted fusel before," I replied. "This is most awkward; I don't see how we are to get him back to Mouschat in this state."

She was too crushed even to voice the "Weeks in that Odah!" which I could see trembling on her lips.

My mind was made up for me. The roads to Kochma and Vastan shut, Mouschat liable to isolation, and now a chance of getting rid of our escort—it was Providence undisguised.

"Izzedin, my son," I said—he saluted amidst the steam-cloud that had enveloped him since he came near the fire—"this is an ill happening; my sister

hath by mischance given the Onbashi too much medicine."

He saluted again. "Verily, Effen', the drugs of Frankistan need handling on tiptoe by the Hands of Age and Experience. Will Selim Onbashi die?"

"Please Allah, he will recover in a few hours. Now, listen; we cannot return to the Odah again, lest we be snow-bound; we will, therefore, proceed to the Diz of Ischaryar Beg. There we will remain until the Kochma road is passable, or Kharlis relieved and the main road to Kochma opened again."

"Pek ala, Effen'. But our orders from the Yozbashi were to escort you to Kochma, or, failing that, back to Mouschat."

"I will give thee a note for the Yozbashi. I would have thee wait here a few hours, until the Onbashi hath slept off the effects of the medicine. When he wakes his head will pain him; bid him dip it in water while he repeateth Al Fatihah; a dip for each verse, and he will be well again. If, when we be gone, thou wilt strip him and dry his clothes against his waking he will feel no ill effect from his wetting."

The petty officer might have objected, but Izzedin highly approved this plan for an easy afternoon. My two companions had listened to the conversation blankly.

"To Kalmaru, Rathia?" said Evelyn.

"It will be cleaner than the Odah, and we can go on when Kharlis is relieved," I returned.

"And when will that be?"

"In about twenty-four hours."

"Oh!" she said. Miksi, thinking she doubted, broke in enthusiastically:

"Believe your sister, Evelyn Effen'. By the House of Mar Shimoun, if she said she would take-convey you to Roum in a week she would do it!"

So we gave Izzedin the note, some tobacco, and an

unexpectedly large bakshish to share with the Onbashi when he woke, and sallied out with his good wishes for parting omen.

From the Khan to the mountain of the Crooked Cleft, ten miles, thence to Kalmaru, one hour's riding. Thus Miksi; we calculated it could be done well before dusk. The good fellow asked me no questions; faith in your superiors and Allah is the one unalloyed virtue of the East. I felt a tremendous lightening of spirits, since Providence had clearly indicated I was to rescue Kharlis. Of the party Evelyn was the gravest. As she had not known how imminent danger to the refugees was she had no cause for exultation, and the Onbashi incident rankled in her proud mind. When they are touchy, blue-eyed, angelic-looking people are diabolically touchy.

"We will get to Kochma a day later than we expected," she remarked.

"And just meet the pater, instead of having to await him in a dirty Armenian house or the Kaimakam's harem," I consoled.

"We are going to a Kurdish harem instead," she grumbled.

"A great improvement," I retorted. "Kurds have some ideas of privacy and cleanliness."

After that we did not talk much, but rode steadily through the light-falling snow. We met nobody. The wind rose as we progressed, blowing full in our faces, and chilled to scarifying point by its passage over the ice-capped Anti-Taurus. Mid-afternoon saw us stumbling up the hill-side, on a track that ascended in terraces coated with ice on which the horses slipped continually. Later the snow ceased to fall and we ascended more easily, an earth of glaring white around and a louring grey sky above.

"What makes people call this a hard passage?" inquired Evelyn.

"I don't know," we chorused. Then we reached the mouth of the Cleft, and knew.

We approached it sideways, round a cliff. The first notable detail was a rush of wind furious enough to bring the horses to a dead stop. The Cleft was a mere slit, not ten feet wide, zigzagging through the rocky rim of the extinct volcano. It must be at least half a mile in length. It had been windy enough lower down; this awful blast, coming compressed through the gap, was paralysing. We were wrapped up very thickly, with pagris wound round our skin-hoods, yet it cut through all like red-hot needles and lashed our eyes like knife-blades.

Miksi howled, and would have turned; I seized the roan's bridle and headed him on. "You are all right, Evie?" I called back.

She nodded, a shade doubtfully, and in we rode. It was dark in the narrow space; the wind brought clouds of powdered snow; it bit like hornets where it could find an open chink to our faces, and cut off the view so that more than once the horses ran into the walls. And it screeched like a thousand lost souls.

I kept Miksi a little in front, to check his tendency to turn and run. Evelyn was sometimes abreast, sometimes a little behind, and so we wrestled on. "Rathia!" she called at last, her voice shrill and laboured, "Can we do it?"

"We have to do it," I shouted back shortly.

"But the horses are getting exhausted——" her voice tailed off.

"The little-young Evelyn Khatoun is not so strong as you, Rathia Effen'," said Miksi. "Let us go back."

In a blind panic himself, he would have turned tail if I had not kept to leeward. The tired nags could never get to the Odah; the Diz was our only salvation. "We are going on," I snarled.

Miksi peered over his shoulder, evidently calculating the chances of a rush past me. Though he is old enough to be my father, I held up my whip. He hunched his shoulders and went on sullenly. Evelyn began to lag; I called to her sharply, and received an answer in a strange, hushed voice that carried oddly through the scream of the wind.

"I can't come any farther, Rathia. I—I—I'm done."

And, as I turned, the bridle dropped from her hands; her horse, deprived of the hold, staggered, and both were swept against the rock.

They remained as they were flung, as though glued to the rock, the horse trembling violently, Evelyn drooping in her saddle, one hand clutching the animal's mane, the other pressed to her chest. "What? Will you show the white feather?" I cried fiercely, thrusting the bridle into her grasp again, with some effort owing to the numbness of my own hands.

"I'm not afraid," she panted. "I've had a time to hold up so far; I was ashamed to tell you how tired I was. I'm tired, tired, and I can't breathe. Leave me."

"Pull yourself together," I responded. "If you give in you will be frozen—die. Don't you understand—DIE?"

She nodded, and I knew there was a weak smile on her hidden face. "I am not afraid to die. I cannot come on."

No time to argue. I had brought her there, the blame was mine, I must bring her out at any cost. "Come on! I command you!" I hissed.

She merely exhibited an intention of drooping off altogether. "Take Semiramis——" she began huskily.

And I did what I had to do. At each movement the

little, choking pulse in the throat, which throbs staccato when you are forcing yourself to something past bearing, throbbed down to my heart, and, for all the cold, drops came out on my forehead, but I did it. Raising my whip, I brought it down on her shoulders twice.

Chapter VII

THE LAW OF QISAS

THE calculation was accurate; what fear of death could not do hurt pride achieved. I knew that Evelyn's features behind the veiling pagri had become deadly pale before and now were scarlet in a rush. I could see her figure stiffen, and hear new life in her voice:

"How dare you?" she cried. "Before a servant——!"

"I am the eldest; I will beat you before all Roum if it is for your good," I returned. "Come on!"

And, as she hesitated, I brought the lash on her shoulders again. No need for another blow; she clutched the bridle and pulled herself and the horse together.

We were nearer the end than we thought, and, struggling and fighting through the icy blast, came out unexpectedly at the other side by the time I was beginning to feel the terrible oppression at the lungs that preludes collapse.

We emerged on a terrace, a step-track ran from our feet down to the cup of the crater: an expanse of wrinkled, scintillating snow bounded by the seamed rim. We could catch fleeting glimpses of it between the gusts which swept up the dry snow in waterspout-like columns, to dash it in showers against the rock behind us. There was no sign of road or human habitation to be seen in the racing dusk.

My stimulant had roused Evelyn past all expectation. Out of the Cleft and on the terrace, where the wind was comparatively nothing, she was about the freshest of the party. After taking a peep at Semiramis, safe nestled in her jacket, she turned her muffled face to me. "I am much obliged to you for your means to an end, Rathia," she said bitterly.

"She *did* beat you, best—only thing for you, Evelyn Effen'. She—big-elder sister—knows best," said Miksi approvingly, recovering from his own panic.

She turned away coldly. "The Diz-fortress is at the west of the bottom of this track-path," he went on, turning to business. We descended to the bottom easily enough in hock-deep snow; there he paused and broke into a dismal whine.

"The snow makes such a difference, Khatoun!" he wailed. "I was only here in summer-warm-weather time!"

A delicate way of intimating that he had lost his bearings. The situation was truly appalling; but it is injudicious to lose one's head in an emergency. "I looked down as carefully as I could.

"What is that dark speck down there?" asked Evelyn, indicating a little blot amidst the snow-wreaths.

We rode down; at nearer view it turned out to be a donkey shivering in the bitter wind with a pair of magpies picking the wounds on its poor, galled back.

"We are on the track!" I cried. "The Khanji at Mouschat told me a caravan with stores for the Diz went through two days ago, when the wind was favourable; they must have abandoned the poor creature."

And I patted its unfortunate head, and put a bullet through. Humanity pays. Drawn by the re-echoing report, two horsemen came sweeping round a nearby spur. The good old rule of conduct, "Who is that?" "A stranger." "Let's 'eave 'alf a brick at 'im," still

holds good in Central Kurdistan, with a bullet to proxy the 'alf brick. I called out, however, in my immaculate Zaza that we were known to Ischaryar Beg. The newcomers were his henchmen, and agreed to conduct us to the fort. They took us respectfully too; I would not let Miksi say who we were, and, with our bundled-up figures, we might have been angels in mufti for all they knew. The Diz was not far off, up a deep cleft in the rim of the crater. From the back of the cleft a half-frozen torrent broke, guarded at the point of emergence by a small keep on a mid-stream rock. Up one bank the Diz proper stood, a fort half built of unhewn stone and half hollowed in the slope, overlooking a large stone-built village.

We rode up the snow-carpeted path, and dismounted in the courtyard amidst a rabble of grooms and children. Evelyn alighted with difficulty; almost too cramped and weary to stand. She tried to refuse my arm, but I made her take it. "Don't make underbred scenes, even if you will not forgive me!" I exclaimed angrily.

She took it then, but avoided leaning on me as much as possible. I knew she was saying—"Beaten like a dog before a servant!" to herself, and hating me as only blue-eyed people can hate.

Ischaryar Beg's audience-hall was vast, low, and dusky with blue billows of tobacco-smoke and black waves from the wood-fire in the centre. Men crowded the cushioned stone benches down the sides, all big, swaggering Kurds save a brace of suave Persians, smoking and drinking tea; at the farther end, on a daïs beside a doorway past which one could see women moving about in an inner room, sat a gorgeous figure, hawk on wrist.

My acquaintance of the Iranian Khan. I marched up and saluted him. "Beg Effen', peace be with thee and with thy house."

"Allah's peace be with thee likewise, my brother," he answered.

"Nay, it is 'sister,'" I replied, laughing and untwisting the muffler from my face.

The other men craned for a look, and said in chorus: "Subhan'llah!" a Moslem ejaculation corresponding to the British "Great Scott!" The Beg started.

"Subhan'llah!" he cried in turn. "The Feringhi Khanoum of the Iranian Khan!"

"Truly, O Beg Effen'. I have come to see the order in which thy tribe is kept—may Allah increase it! Did we not speak of it in Roum?"

"Verily." Here he remembered his manners. "Bismillah, Khanoum. In Name of Allah condescend to be seated. And these——?"

"My sister, O Beg, and yonder is the last of our party, our servant Mikrasi Gauriel, a man of Tiyari."

The Beg got up and bowed us to the seat of honour on his right. Miksi sat by the fire with the men; Evelyn worked some cushions between her and myself, and lay back with closed eyes. The Kurdish was unintelligible to her. The company gazed at us with the stolid gaze of the Orient when it is startled.

"Ye are very welcome," the Beg repeated, awkward with surprise. "I never dreamed that Allah would send you to visit my poor home—is He not truly named Zu'l Jalali wa'l Ikram?"

"We were benighted," I explained. "And, knowing Kalmaru was near, and having met thee, O Beg, in Roum, we came here, sure of finding a corner for Children of the Road."

"Y'Allah, our Beg's hospitality is known even in Roum!" cried several. Ischaryar bridled with pride.

"I am one of the least of Allah's stewards," he answered smugly. "But ye be weary; condescend to

rest in the rooms of the women of my house ere ye speak of your journeying."

"Indeed that will suit us," I answered. "My sister is not too strong, and it is a hard way through the Crooked Cleft."

"This poor house is not mine; it is yours," he replied, getting up to bow with a sweeping gesture of both arms. "We will live a thousand years in your visit; for the which I thank He who is Al Wahabb and Zu'l Jalali wa'l Ikram."

And he bowed us towards the inner apartments. "Relief of Kharlis, Khatoun?" whispered Miksi, as I passed him.

"Preparations start in an hour," I returned.

And, "Alhamdu'llah!" he responded simply.

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Lailah Khanoum, Ischaryar's sole wife, was a Zaza, a tall, flat-backed, magnificent creature, with almost classic features, and a skin of lightest ivory. But for her stately Kurdish costume she might have stepped from the pages of *Punch* during the Keene and Du Maurier epoch. She had five sons, but they stayed in the outer rooms—Kurdish women are not veiled or secluded, but they naturally like to keep their own quarters to themselves, and the men are not supposed to come into their part of the house without asking prettily beforehand. With her was a pretty daughter of about fifteen, a reproduction of herself on a less scale, named Esma. The visible remainder of the household comprised two handsome Georgian freedwomen, with a baby apiece, and an orderly rabble of slaves and children.

The gentlewoman is the same all over the world. Lailah Khanoum's emotions, when Ischaryar brought us in, must have been akin to those of a London hostess whose husband has unexpectedly piloted a brace of

plumed and blanketed Cherokee squaws into her drawing-room; but her self-composure was perfect, and she intoned the welcoming "Bism'illah!" with steady gravity as she bowed us to the seat of honour. Her low, refined voice reminded me of Aunt Domitia, and the way in which she established Evelyn near the fire and drew the gloves off her cold-blackened hands of Grandmamma Naseby.

Myself I did not offer Evelyn any assistance, from the way in which she avoided looking at me I knew she would rather be attended by a stranger. The room was large, constricted by a row of wheat-bins towering to the ceiling along one side, and a file of oil jars, each big enough to hold a man and reminiscent of the Forty Thieves, at the far end. The Georgians came in and peeped at us shyly over the babies, the slaves and children flocked to the doorway, to stare by gangs and run quickly for fear of the Evil Eye. Pretty Esma Khanoum, inspired by her mother, ventured in and chafed Evelyn's hands, afterwards squatting at her feet and holding one. I knew as well as if she had said it that she thought my all-English sister was an angel, and would float back to heaven at any moment unless safe anchored.

Our hostess spoke an apology as she handed the cigarettes and tea. "The Khanoum Effen' is asleep," she said.

She was on the horns of a dilemma. The head lady of an upper-class Turkish house is known as the Khanoum Effen', or "Madame" *par excellence*, and the evenness of choice between leaving guests to be entertained by the second in command and waking an important personage will be apparent to the adept in Eastern etiquette. I begged her not to disturb the Khanoum Effen'.

Much relieved, she confided to me that the Khanoum

Effen' was the Beg's grandmother—his step-grandmother I should have put it, the youngest and sole surviving widow of the late Beg. "And one does not like to wake her," added the gentle soul. "She is white-haired and so old—near forty."

Here the Beg returned. He had repaired to the common room after introducing us, and it did not need second sight to see that he had received a full account of us from the Gadarwand spy, who had preceded us before the wind changed and had tried to hide behind a Persian half as large as himself when we made our entry.

The Kurd's account of us, gleaned from the Odah gossip, had not lost anything in its passage from oriental tongue to oriental tongue, though accurate in the main. We subsequently learnt, through Lailah Khanoum, that we were granddaughters of the Sultana Victoria, and I was under promise to marry Abdul Hamid if I was satisfied with the look of his realm after a tour of inspection. We did not attempt the thankless task of correcting it. As it was it had increased the Beg's respect for us.

He expressed his sorrow for the danger of Kharlis, and asked for further particulars, as news from the west had been scarce of late at Kalmaru. I told him briefly our latest information, adding: "And thou, Beg Effen', art a Hamidieh Yozbashi."

His eyes drooped. "Kharlis is without the pale of my rule, Khanoum Effen'."

"The besiegers are Gadarwands," I said. "Is it true, that word thou spakest in Roum, that thy tribe be more than a handful, yea, even of power to keep up a feud with another strong tribe?"

"It is growing to the time of Allah's Yearly Truce, Khanoum."

I could see he was hedging, and was only reminding

me that the snow would soon put a stop to all war operations for the winter, because he did not like to attack the Gadarwands while they were harrying Christians, for fear the Padishah should think he favoured the latter. The Gadarwands probably counted on this. My ace must go on the table.

Evelyn was more of a novelty to the women than I was, and we had been conversing unnoticed while they devoted themselves to her. "Lailah Khanoum, we have been speaking of feuds," I said, raising my voice. "Didst live in Kalmaru in the days wherein the Gadarwands raided it?"

"Verily, Khanoum," her eyes flickered. "The number of my fingers that was the number of my years then, it was twice as many years ago, and I remember it all! But for the Khanoum Effen' we were all dead now."

"Indeed?" I lifted my eyebrows.

"Truly. Most of the men were absent on a raid to the north, and we were women and children, boys and old men here. Then, in the day's middle, came the Khanoum Effen', and she cried to us: 'Women and little ones and greyheads, Allah hath sent me to tell ye the Gadarwands be upon ye!'

"And we were as sheep waiting the butcher; but she made us all gather in the Diz and shut the gates. And, Allah, how she drove us! Boiling lead and boiling water and heated stones were our main weapons, but a few guns were with us, and *she* was with us! Y'Allah, we obeyed her as though she had been the Beg's self. The children wrought as full-grown women, the old and the boys as men, and the grown women as so many Rustams! And she stood on the roof and used a gun, and Allah the Inheritor and the Nekirin alone know how many she slew ere the pistol, exploding in the hand of one of our lads as he fell dead beside her, burnt her face

and her eyes ! And, being blinded, she lashed us with her tongue so that we held the Diz until the besiegers retired for fear our men should return and hem them in unawares."

"I was told somewhat of that at Mouschat," I assented. "And during these twenty years since the feud hath gone on ? But what was done to punish the Gadarwands for that raid ?"

I turned to the Beg with the question, Lailah returned to Evelyn. "All Kurdistan laughed at the Gadarwands who were driven by women, boys, and the old," Ischaryar replied. I nodded.

"Well, but I thought ye Kurds were Moslems ; hath the law of Qisas been abrogated in Kurdistan ?"

He stared. "It is a very good law," I went on, meditatively. "It runneth, if my memory serves, 'Life for life, tooth for tooth, eye for eye, and a raid on unprotected villages for a raid on unprotected villages.' Is it not so, Beg Effen' ?"

Ischaryar would never have thought of it all by himself. He was rather stupid by nature. At my words he grinned ever so little.

"If trouble rose at home and the Gadarwands returned to see about it they would have neither strength nor stomach to return to Kharlis before the Diabekr troops came in," he said.

"We were not speaking of Kharlis," I answered. "We were but discussing the law of Qisas to divert my mind from sad thoughts of my friends in the town."

His grin became irrepressible. I had touched his Kurdish spirit of vengeance and Kurdish humour. What a good thought it was ! The feud had gone on for years with varying success, but, Allah 'l Hasib, here was place for a master-stroke ! Kurdistan would talk of it ; how Ischaryar of Kalmaru had nursed his ven-

geance from youth to manhood, and then, after twenty years, had in one mighty day made his foes pay in kind and with interest ! Kurds nurse and gloat over their vendettas as a British squire keeps and brags over his port. After a few minutes' silent cogitation he strode out. The seed was sown.

Chapter VIII

THE MYSTERIOUS LADY OF KALMARU

AT that point a slave ran in to report that the Khanoum Effen' was awake, and wanted to know the reason of the unusual bustle. Esma ran to enlighten her; I turned hesitatingly to Evelyn.

"Oh, I'm all right now, Rathia," she returned coldly, to my inquiries. "No *sal volatile*, thank you; I do not need any more of your stimulants at present."

Sadly I reflected that she must be offended beyond forgiveness to indulge in spite. The voice of Esma, discoursing artlessly as she returned along a passage from the inner apartments, saved further speech.

"Haste, do haste, O Effen' Jan!" she was saying, in incautious top notes. "I tell you they are not human! The little one is like Nebbi Daoud in our Orussé picture, all pink and white and gold, and the elder is like a hawk and a cypress at once! I believe they are Piris."

"Hush, child!" returned an older, mellower voice, in the grave tone with a laugh at the back of it peculiar to elderly folk chiding a young favourite. "Mas'allah! It is ill to speak evil of rulers, and, I pray thee, is not the bidden guest Ruler of All, and the unbidden one Ruler of even the bidden?"

"But, Khanoum Effen', Piris be good spirits; at the least not so evil as the other Jinn," pouted Esma, as she led her companion into the room.

The head lady of Kalmaru was extremely tall; as she stepped into the firelight she made an imposing picture, with her loose-flowing violet and black silk garments, her snow-white hair gleaming in patches through the mesh of gold chains strung with coins, tomauns, and medjidieh, and even several Parthian and Sassanian pieces which dangled round her head and over the upper part of her features. On account of this network, it was difficult to make out her face distinctly; all we could be sure of for the while comprised a firm, square chin, full, closely folded lips, and a grandly moulded neck. A well-preserved, middle-aged woman, I decided. She raised her right hand, a beautiful hand, the nails delicately tinted with henna, and spoke:

"'Salamu alai koum, Bism'illah 'I Kerim!" she intoned in a deep and resonant tone. "Guests be ever welcome here, and doubly so unknown Children of the Road."

"'Salamu alaika wa rahmatu'llahi!" I returned. "We be ladies of Frankistan, two sisters, by name Evelyn Jerningham and Rathia Jerningham. This is my sister Evelyn——"

"Feringhi ladies?" she interrupted, her voice shrill on a sudden. "Jerningham? In Name of Allah——"

"The Khanoums are Unbelievers, it is true, but they be most gracious Unbelievers—and guests," interposed Lailah anxiously.

While I was speaking the elder woman had started forward and was staring in my direction with a tense intentness that was startling in its contrast to her manner of a minute before. Her lips were parted and rigid, her hands clenched and trembling, and, to see the better, she shook the dangling chains aside from her face. The revelation thus made caused us both to start with horror; the upper part of her features was a seamed, drawn mass of pits and scars, healed, but twisted out

of all proper shape, and her eyes were bloodshot balls veined with blotches of chalky blue alone.

Lailah's tale of the siege recurred to me; the Khanoum Effen' was partly blind. As swiftly as she had shown the emotion it vanished; she straightened herself and laughed low and sweetly. "Khanoum, Feringhi ladies do not come to Kalmaru every moon!" she cried. "We have heard of them from the Beg, but—y'Allah, would you not be astonished if two Kurdish ladies came without warning to your home in Frankistan?"

"Verily, Effen'!" I echoed the laugh. "Give me the pleasure——"

She had taken a step in a confused way; we all jumped up, I was first and led her to the seat of honour. She retained my hand, and peered at me through the chains. "So thou art named Rathia?" she said. "And this is thy sister?" she bent and looked intently at Evelyn. "Ah, thou art easy to discern, little one," she said. "Hair of gold and shining skyey eyes; a true Feringhi Khanoum, such as the Beg saw in Roum."

"My sister cannot understand Zaza," I explained.

"But thou canst," she turned to me. I had taken a seat beside her. "Thou art harder to discern. Wilt thou have mercy on a half-blind woman?"

The apology was for her extended hands; nobody could have objected to the touch with which her delicate finger-tips traced my features. They trembled as they lingered on my cheeks. "Sister to the golden Khanoum!" she said, laughing softly. "It seems that the dove and the falcon come from the same egg in wondrous Frankistan! And Allah hath sent you to us——?"

It was a polite way of asking how we came there. I told all in a few words. She listened in silence, her chin on her palm. "And so we came to the Cleft, and came

through with toil, the wind being contrary and the snow falling——”

When I reached this point she laid her hands on my shoulders. “Wet!” she exclaimed sharply. “Lailah, Esma, we are eating dirt in that we leave our guests in damp and discomfort to amuse us with tales!”

“Allah forgive us!” cried Lailah, conscience-smitten.

“He will when we have whitened our faces again,” returned the head lady. “Follow me, of your kindness, Rathia Khanoum and Evelyn Khanoum.”

The Diz was a warren of corridors and rooms. The Khanoum Effen’, after giving a few orders, led us into the complex, walking before us with a splendid swing of the hips and shoulders and just touching the walls now and then with her fingers, after the way of purblind folk in a known place. Evelyn did not speak to me, but devoted her attention to Esma, who kept beside her and sustained a jerky conversation in dumb-show.

“Bism’illah!” The Khanoum Effen’ held a curtain back. “Please you to remember, Khanoums, this house is your own.”

She ushered us into a large, dusky room. At one side were mattresses rolled in chintz covers, at the other a line of mule-trunks; a cushioned divan ran across the far end, green and brown Kermanshah felts covered most of the floor; a copper brazier smouldered before the divan.

Our conductor sent the slaves, who had ventured to follow us, packing by means of a few curt sentences, and sent Esma on an errand. “Hot water,” I said, to break the ice. “Kurds have some idea that it can be put to some uses other than making tea and scalding besiegers, Evie.”

She shrugged her shoulders carelessly. “Your garments are wet and mired,” our hostess observed. “Will you condescend to wear some of ours while they dry?”

We expressed our obligation, she opened a trunk and began to turn over piles of silk and linen.

"Now I wonder how long we will be here?" said Evelyn in an impersonal tone. "When will the Diabekr troops reach Kharlis?"

I was tired and disheartened and forgot myself. "In a week——" I began.

"In a week?" she almost shrieked. "The town cannot hold out until then! You did not tell me——"

I bit my lip in vexation. It must be full truth again. "You did not ask me for the exact date. You need not be distressed, however; the Beg will relieve the town to-morrow. When he returned to the men's room I heard him sending messengers to summon the clansmen from the other villages. They depart in the morning."

"What! Did you persuade him?"

"I did."

"He dare not help Christians before. It is hard to believe——"

"You think I am lying?" I retorted as she hesitated.

"You—you made me believe that the troops would come in time." She looked at me, white-faced, and with disgust and horror in her sapphire eyes. I grew reckless with anger. "Will you believe logical proof?" I demanded. "It would not do for the Beg to help Christians, but he was ready enough to do an ugly turn to his enemies the Gadarwands. I accordingly pointed out that their villages are at present solely inhabited by old men, children, and women——"

"Rathia! You said that?"

"I commented on it, and to-morrow the marksmen go to raid them." I stared at her coolly. "Do you not perceive? The Gadarwands will hear of the chappaw and leave Kharlis while they go to the rescue, and so there will be a great intertribal fighting and no time for further Christian-harrying this year."

“But—to set the men on the unprotected villages!”
And she looked dazed.

“To save Kharlis.”

“A wrong to right a wrong.”

“A means to an end.”

“I believe you are joking, Rathia.”

“I would not venture to joke with you at present. By the honour of my mother! You can believe me now.”

“Rathia, if this is true you are a devil!”

“I am a devil then.”

Suddenly she gripped my wrists and looked fairly into my eyes. “Rathia, I cannot believe this, even of you. You have done horrid things before, but your reasons—— What made you do this?”

How that “even” stung! “The Gadarwand spy,” I answered. “I noticed him in the hall; Ischaryar does not suspect him; when the men assemble he will take a short cut to Kharlis—you perceive? Ischaryar’s muster will take a long north-west path round the hills; the Gadarwands, warned, will be able to intercept them before they get to the village. It will thus resolve itself into a fight between two well-matched parties of men.”

“Oh, Rathia! How I have misjudged you!”

“No, you were right. I am a devil. Just think of the treachery of sending our host out—though I will say, in my defence, that I am sure Ischaryar will have the best of it. Double treachery, as you will perceive, a brutal affair altogether. But I am brutal—witness your shoulders.”

She had removed some of her wet garments before we began to talk. Her high-bred skin was as sensitive as her high-bred pride—the lashes had left raised purple brands on the snow of it. Suddenly all my rage died; I laid my face on the marks and cried. As suddenly her slim bare arms were round my neck.

"Dear Rathia ! Dear sister !" she half sobbed. "I have hated you for hours, yet all the time I knew every blow hurt you more than me. You are always in the right. Dear girl, can you ever forgive me ?"

She held me off and we looked into each other's eyes. And I knew that perfect understanding had come to us both.

"That is right," said a pleased voice. "Not to forgive is against the law of your faith, Evelyn Khanoum. Is it not written in your Injil that a woman should not let the sun go down on her wrath, but leave the men to fight it out ?"

The speaker was the Khanoum Effen'. And the speech was couched in excellent English.

"Effen', what have you heard ?" was all I could articulate.

"All about Kharlis," she replied placidly.

Chapter IX

THE ENIGMATIC KHANOU M EFFEN'

WE were utterly undone, and, quite distraught by the shock on top of the tiring day, I lost my head and did the most foolish thing possible. I reached the Kurd in a bound, flung one arm round her, pinioning her own arms and holding her tight to me, and snatched a long dagger from the silver sheath at her waist. She did not call out, nor struggle, but stiffened in my grasp and turned her staring eyes alternately from my face to the light that ran up and down the dagger-blade as I held the point quivering against her side.

"Khanoum, Khanoum ! Do not strike, for sake of Allah 'r Rahim, for the God of Pity's sake ! Not that ! Not that, O Allah al Kabir !" she cried at last.

I have never heard another human voice express such abject fear. Her rich, deep tones had suddenly developed the shrill whimper of a trapped animal. And yet Lailah had described her for a reckless Amazon !

"Rathia, don't !" Evelyn cried simultaneously. "Not that !"

For a few moments I stood, the woman's body clutched to mine, the dagger ready, and her opaque eyes glaring unutterable horror into my own. It was not, ultimately, even Evelyn's pleading that made me release her. It was the appeal of those half-blinded eyes. I stepped back sullenly.

"Indeed, what good would it do to slay thee ?" I said.

She stood, a little dazed, put her hands out gropingly, took a step forwards, and almost swayed over. Promptly Evelyn seized one of the hands and led her to the divan.

"Thank you," said the Kurd, in her correct, stiff English. "I seem to see a thicker mist than is customary with me. Rathia Khanoum, you have rubbed dirt upon your hands; why did you do so foolish a thing?"

"Because I was crazed," I replied. "I have truly slain my sister. Dear Evelyn"—and I turned to her—"I have brought you into this trap——"

"If you had taken me into your confidence I would willingly have taken the risk of our failing, to try and save the poor folk at Kharlis. It is not your fault that we have failed, dear Rathia. Who would have dreamed of a Kurd in mid-Kurdistan understanding English?" she returned quietly.

"But, dear little sister—our failing spells—Death."

"But, dear big sister, I never expected to live for ever!"

"You are so young to die——"

"Young or old one can

"... die

As a great dame should—decorously."

She repeated the quotation with a lilt, and smiled the while with steady-shining eyes and scornful lips, looking as her French compeers must have looked as they exchanged weather-chat in the tumbrils.

"God forgive me!" I said. "Khanoum Effen', here is your khanjar," and I flung it down at her feet. "My pistol I keep, but it is not for thee nor any other Kurd. Call now for assistance, and tell the tale."

At the moment Esma bustled in with a steaming bowl. It was past the grotesque; her girlish self-satisfaction and enjoyment of the strange visitors coming in that heart of tragedy. I held my breath and

waited, an arm round Evelyn and a hand on my revolver.

"Now thou wilt bring a set of thy finest raiment for the little Khanoum," said the Khanoum Effen'.

The girl glided away, well pleased. "I have seen a cat playing with a pair of mice she has lamed," I said grimly.

"Listen, Khanoum," our tormentor replied. "In Frankistan is it not the way for men to assure a woman she is an angel and to treat her as though she were a fool? I assure you you are a fool, and will treat you both as though you were angels."

She broke off, unwound the Kerman shawl from her own hips, and folded it carefully round Evelyn's bare shoulders. "You will catch cold, my child," she observed. "Your sister is careless of you——"

"Indeed she is not," retorted Evelyn with vigour. "What use to think of cold when we are to die in a little time?"

"Die?" repeated the Khanoum Effen'. "Most foolish of children, why should I cause you to die? Your plot to make a battle? Am I a fool, I pray, that I should bring the wrath of the Queen of England on us for the killing of two of her subjects? How am I to prove your plotting, also? If I say simply to Ischaryar: 'The stranger who came to-day is a Gadarwand spy, I know it,' will not the young men fall on your spy and slay him at once—and what of your plot then?"

This was true. Why had I not thought of it in time? This woman who knew English and the power of Britain might well have let us go scot free, and contented herself with nipping our scheme in the bud—but for one thing "If I had not attacked you, you would have been content with frustrating our plans?" I asked, in despair.

"Why did you do it?" she asked back. "I marvel you did not perceive that it was the worst thing you could do."

"My sister, for the moment, was incapable of reflection," Evelyn returned hotly. "She is as my mother——"

"Yes, yes!" cried the Kurd. "Mothers will do anything for their children. Doubtless Lailah hath told you I am a barren woman, but, by the Glory of Allah, if I had a child I—I would fire the world and burn all other mothers' children on it to warm her hands if she had need of it! I'd break all Allah's laws to please her, and go to hell content if that would make me a stepping-stone for her to mount to heaven!"

She had spoken with increasing passion; now she checked herself, and, in her usual tone, resumed: "It was well done, in a way; tell me, though, w' y did you release me so suddenly? Was it for your sister's pleading?"

"Nay," I returned. "It was because—because I could not strike you. You are older than I am—and—and I am grieved that you cannot see well—and—and I could not strike."

I was never so much at a loss for words. "Al-hamdu'l'llah! Pay for a score of years!" she muttered to herself. Then she sank on the divan and motioned me to sit beside her.

The woman bewitched me. I obeyed. If any other Oriental had bidden me establish myself side by side with her after the preceding scene I would have declined, for fear of finding a spare knife in my ribs anon. She laid a hand on mine. "Do you know what 'I swear by Allah 'l Aziz,' means?" she asked.

"It is an oath that, with Moslems, admits of no mental reservation."

"Then, by Allah 'l Aziz, I bear you no grudge for

aught you have done ! You may eat and drink and sleep in peace in this house for me. Yea, you and your sister. By Allah al Qawi, al Majid, 'l Aziz ! ”

“ You will be content with frustrating our plans ? ” I cried.

“ And killing the poor spy ? ” Evelyn supplemented.

The Kurd laughed. “ He may likewise eat and sleep safely. Listen ; I speak English, and in some things I have English thoughts, and one is that it is ugly to send armed men on women and little children. Indeed, I was horror-struck when I heard you had advised it, Rathia Khanoum, and my joy when you explained your real purpose to your sister caused me to forget myself and speak in English. Otherwise, it had been my intention to let your plans go on——”

“ You meant to allow your tribe to run into an ambush ? ” I said. “ Is not that a little hard to believe ? ”

“ Believe it, Khanoum, if only for its lack of plausibility. Yes, I would have let them run into an ambush—but with their eyes open. I have a reputation for owning the gift of prophecy ; I will say to the Beg that I have in a dream seen our men meet with a foe on the way ; and so he will be on his guard. Our muster will be well able to beat any force the Gadarwand can send. Yes”—here her expression became pensive—“ it is an excellent thing for us. The word of one spy will not count against that of a Beg and his whole men, and that Beg a Hamidieh Yozbashi. We can swear, if the Government makes inquiry, that the Gadarwand attacked us first. And my forewarning will be to my credit with our tribe.”

“ But why will you do this ? ” I demanded incredulously.

“ My first reason is evident. I owe the ascendancy over the tribe which you will presently find I own to

my reputation as a prophetess, and am unwilling to waste a chance of strengthening it. And, likewise, I have English thoughts, and do not think it amiss that those poor Christians and kindly missionaries at Kharlis should be relieved. Do you now believe me ?”

“I do,” said Evelyn with conviction.

“I do,” I said, with surprise at myself.

“You do wisely. Now, my children, I do you a favour in one way; do me one in return to seal your belief. I speak English——”

“Wonderfully,” we both interrupted.

She smiled oddly. “It creaks a little from disuse, like the boat-bridge below the Baghdad Touroumbah opening to let a string of baggalah through; but, whatever it is like, for my own purpose I have hidden my knowledge of it since I came here, and beg you will not betray me.”

We promised. She must have read in our faces the query we dare not enunciate. “Never mind how I learnt it,” she said, with a little passing frown. “Allah knows—He is merciful and compassionate.”

“By witchcraft, I believe,” I answered lightly.

“Yea, I am a witch,” she agreed, speaking in Zaza.

Esma re-entered. “If thou art a witch, thy magic is of Rahmani make, Khanoum Effen’,” she said.

“They burnt a Sheitani witch at Malatia last year and my father brought me home a pinch of the ashes. I have them in a bag round my neck for an evil eye talisman. I am going to show it to the golden Khanoum, and the tall Khanoum must tell her all about it.”

She hooked a finger down her collar. “Nay, not so,” the Khanoum Effen’ warned. “Feringhi ladies dislike such-like talismans; if thou showest it to the little Khanoum she will be disgusted, and, maybe, refuse to wear thy raiment.”

“Indeed, Effen’ ?” the girl sighed reluctantly. “I will

be guided by thee, though I dearly wished the little Khanoum to see it. She hath a most beautiful watch, given her by her father, and I wished to show her that the fathers of Kurdish girls give them beautiful and useful presents too. But I wish more to see her in my raiment."

Chapter X

THE PAST OF THE KHANOUM EFFEN'

BEHOLD Evelyn presently arrayed in Esma's Friday-go-to-mosque toilette of petticoat-like silk trousers, tunic, shawl-sash, and velvet jacket, her ultra-European little head with its ethereal features and Psyche knot of pale gold capping all incongruously; her feet encased in red Persian slippers, which afforded her the liveliest delight, though they fell off frequently. Esma enacted maid with equally vivacious enjoyment; on the subject of dress they needed no interpreter, but managed capitally with dumb-show.

The Khanoum Effen', in the meantime, brought an armful of her own garments. "The other women are not of thy height, Effen'," she explained, and with simple dignity helped me to dress. Evelyn, now rested and in great spirits, shuffled over to admire me and compare my appearance favourably with that of the cycling ladies who had been the latest sensation when she left London.

All Western by nature, she was quite satisfied with the Khanoum Effen's promise. Her fun was contagious; I laughed back at her sallies, and wondered at myself the while for trusting our hostess. She held us in the hollow of her hand, yet trust her I did.

For pity's sake we then returned to the big room, where Lailah and the Georgians had been dying in agonies of inquisitiveness while we were out of sight;

and we all sat round the stamped leather dinner-mat in company with the Beg, and I related our adventures more at length and gave a summary of our respective biographies while we feasted on dolma (which is the nicest dish made anywhere if you are not too proud to like onions), fowl, curds, clotted cream, pilau, manna sweetmeats, and blanket bread.

The Khanoum Effen' had posted herself where there was much shade, and, as I had been placed at her right hand, I could observe her closely. Beyond seeing to my wants, she paid no attention to the meal; she spoke but rarely too, but that seemed to be her usual habit, and her scarce words were listened to with proportionate respect. When dinner was ended and the cigarettes and tea circulated I leant back to study her profile carefully.

At the other side of her Evelyn was holding an animated conversation with the Beg in French, and on her the whole attention of the company was fixed, Esma crouching at her feet in company with Semiramis; overcoming her Moslem dislike of dogs for the rapture of gazing on this blonde marvel from afar. Throughout our stay it was the same; I was left comparatively in the background, and it was only natural; a woman speaking good Zaza, built like a Beyreuth leading contralto, and coloured like a Christmas Number presentation plate, was too much in the style of our hostesses to attract notice.

So the others hung breathlessly on the Beg's translations; even the stately Khanoum Effen' turned to listen, and so I inspected her at ease. What a lovely woman she must have been! Even now, with the chains and coins mercifully hiding the wrecked eyes, she was beautiful. The lips and chin and mobile nostrils were delicately cut as Evelyn's own, but of a rich, full cast; looking at her I thought of Trojan Helen

—Helen, back at Sparta—mature, and chastened, and tight lipped with memory of the years behind. Also, in a vague way, the grand, spoiled face put me in mind of some other I knew but could not name; it might be the De la Borde head from the Parthenon.

But the beauty was a secondary matter; I analysed every one of the features by the same test—"True or treacherous?" And every line said "True." And still I was uneasy, for my folly alone had put Evelyn's life in this stranger's power.

I could not be allowed to remain silent for long. Turning her head to me in a covert way, and finding my eyes scanning her, the Khanoum Effen' was startled for a moment out of her composure.

"My dear——" she began, then, checking herself with oriental adroitness, covered her slip by proceeding in Zaza without a change of tone—"What is the meaning of that, Effen'? Ye use it frequently, thou and thy sister. Is it like our 'Inshallah'?"

"Nay, Effen', it is but an affectionate form of address used by Englishwomen when they be fond of one another."

"Truly ye love one another very greatly," she commented. "But then ye are sisters."

"That is hard to believe," said Lailah. The Georgians chorused assent. They did not speak much; they knew their places, and that, as ex-slaves, it behoved them to let the free-born ladies do the talking.

In a foolish moment I explained our relationship. It is always a trouble for Eastern people, with some knowledge of the monogamous habits of the West, to understand it. The Beg, after a pause for cogitation, looked triumphant.

"Deux sœurs, deux mères, un père," he observed. "I perceive, thou, Rathia Khanoum, art the elder and leader, thy mother I gather was the wife, and the mother of Evelyn Khanoum was but a——"

Oh dear! How smartly Evelyn put him right! "You should not be vexed," I chided in English. "It's bad form, and, besides, he did not mean anything."

"I know," she responded. "Still, do you expect me not to be wild when I hear such a word used in connection with Mother?"

But she made amends at once and charmed the startled Beg afresh until he was able to discuss our future plans with quietness. We gently but firmly declined Lailah's invitation to stay for the winter, and insisted that we must start the very next day to relieve our father's anxiety.

"The dog-fathered Gadarwand hold the high-road," said one of the Georgians.

"By Allah's decree," I agreed. "But, Beg Effen'; can you not spare a brace of your men who know of by-roads?"

He looked grave. "It so happens, Khanoum, that I ride with my men in the early part of to-morrow—Inshallah!—on business——"

"Nevertheless, since the Khanoums are bent on rejoining their father, we must aid them," said Lailah. "Ali and Zaid are somewhat young for thy business, my husband; they shall escort our guests; their presence will be better guard than a hundred common men."

Ali and Zaid were her eldest sons. The Khanoum Effen' spoke: "Rathia Khanoum, we know more ways from our home than the high-road. We would detain ye as long as we might, but when ye elect to leave us poorer of your company we will show ye a road by the which ye may in one hour come within sight of the town Bitfa."

Bitfa is a town on the main Akhlat road, between Kochma and Kharlis, and only some ten miles distant from the former place. I stared. "Is it safe, Effen'?" the Beg whispered.

"The Khanoums have not come to spy ways to our home, my son," she responded. "Rathia Khanoum, by to-morrow it is a question whether thy father will be at Kochma or Bitfa; my grandsons shall take ye first to Bitfa, then if ye must on to Kochma it is but two hours' ride. As to the way, ye shall see it—Inshallah!—to-morrow."

So it was settled, and we talked the night away until Evelyn began to nod in the middle of her own best story. "Our guests are weary," said the Khanoum Effen', and sent the others after various things for our comfort while she escorted us to our room.

It' was the same one to which we had been taken before. "This is my apartment, when we do not entertain English ladies," she said, facing me with something of defiance in her tone. "So far I have not been out of earshot of ye; ye therefore know I have had no opportunity of betraying you yet. Now, weary as you are, Rathia Khanoum, I presume you will keep watch all night lest I get to treachery and harm befall your sister."

My words of denial died as she went on. "You will! You have been saying in your heart: 'The fear will begin when the Khanoum Effen' is out of my sight!' Sah! Don't deny it, child. When my grandchild comes to remove my necessary property do you say, as it were of your courtesy, you would not have me disturbed, and I will stay here the night."

I made a gesture of dissent. "You need not mind my presence for one night," she added.

"Your company would give us pleasure," I replied. "I am truly loath to drive you out."

"You can place your bed across the doorway so that I cannot get out of the room without waking you," she went on.

"We will certainly do nothing of the sort."

"You fear a certain draught more than possible treachery?" she laughed.

"My sister believes in you," interposed Evelyn. "She has no fear of treachery from you, but she thinks it clever to be suspicious of every one. She would have made a fine policeman."

"Policeman, my dear?" The Khanoum Effen' looked puzzled. It was odd to find an English-speaking person who did not know what the article was.

"A Feringhi sowar," I explained.

"As like a sowar as houris are like angels," Evelyn said, with British bumptiousness. "I'm glad you'll stay, Effen'."

So our hostess took up her quarters at one end of the big room and we had the other, and I was glad enough to crawl between the blankets and dare to take some rest. I have dog's ears, and she could not stir without my knowledge.

After a great deal of trampling the Diz sank into the silence of a few hours' slumber. I do not know how long we had slept, but it was certainly the middle of the night when a sound of stealthy footsteps woke me. I was on the alert at once, but instinctively did not move; Evelyn lay sound asleep by my side and Semiramis hunted in dreams and snored about it at our feet; a lamp burnt dimly in a niche, and, my eyes growing fitted to the light, the cause of the microscopic noise was apparent. The Khanoum Effen' had stepped lightly across the room and now dropped on her knees beside me.

She bent over me. I half closed my eyes, not that she could see if they were open, with her own partial blindness. "Rathia Khanoum, are you awake?" she asked distinctly.

I thought it best to return no answer. For all the chilly midnight a cold dew came over my forehead.

This was a trap: if she had really wished to waken me she would have touched me.

Then she remained kneeling in silence. What could I do? I dare not move, for various prudential reasons and one personal one. In the matter of quickness of movement a woman on her knees has the advantage of one who is lying on her back and hampered by several blankets and a bearskin. Secondly, there was just a chance that she was actuated by no more evil a motive than inquisitiveness, in which case a fresh attack on my part would undoubtedly outwear her patience. And, for personal reason, I shrank from again touching her roughly; at thought of it an ugly tingling ran down the arm with which I had gripped her before.

So I lay helpless, and she knelt silently, and presently bent over me. I could not be really sure that I felt a kiss on my forehead and a hand smoothing my hair; people with poor sight have such a sense of touch, but in some unintelligible way the futility of my suspicions came over me like a wave, the galvanic fit of activity spurred by it into my brain died, and I was at peace and sleepy again.

"Janan-i-man!" she whispered, then, as though alarmed at her boldness: "Rathia Khanoum, are you cold?"

I made no answer, simply because I was sleepy and unafraid. She sank back on her heels, I relapsed into slumber, and left her kneeling there.

When the patter of the waking Diz roused us she was at her own end of the room, putting a final touch of rouge on her lips with the air of one just awakened from a good night's rest. I did not tell her I had heard her creeping away from beside me a little while earlier; why she should elect to spend the night on her knees was a mystery to me, and I was willing to let it pass at that. Of course I could not help speculating a great

deal while I performed my own toilet. Somnambulism was feasible to some extent; she might have been acting over some bygone joy or tragedy in her sleep—but then she had spoken my name, and had corrected herself hurriedly when an incautious raising of her voice might have been calculated to wake me. I could find no solution. I could not even understand my own refusal to distrust her.

When we came out to the courtyard the clan had gathered, five hundred well-mounted warriors, and the Beg led them off northwards, leaving Ali and Zaid looking very sour at having to stay behind. We took our own departure soon afterwards.

“What a beautiful woman the Khanoum Effen’ must have been in her youth!” I remarked to Lailah after breakfast, while the Khanoum Effen’ herself was out of hearing, absorbed in a conversation, conducted in halting Turkish, with Evelyn. “Doubtless she was renowned as the Flower of her Tribe, my sister.”

“She was but a town Kurd,” replied Lailah.

“A town Kurd?” I repeated.

“Verily, from Trebizond.”

“Thy husband’s grandfather travelled far for his marrying, then?”

“Y’Allah, nay! She was waiting in the Diz for him when first his eyes lit on her. It is quite a little tale, and by Ali (on whom be blessings!) she was beautiful as Nimroud Dagħ on a showery noon! Twenty years ago, Khanoum, and I was but young then, but by Allah and His Prophet I remember the beauty of her in the one hour between her coming and the coming of the shot that scarred her. Women of the tribe who are older than I remember it even better. Her hair was like thine, Khanoum, red as the second shading of the autumn leaves, Mas’allah! And the colour of her eyes no man can name, for they were all red fire. By

the Prophet (bliss attend his beard !) we took her for a Piri at the first, then for Jibrail's self in woman's guise when she rode into the court and bade us arm and made us arm. Yea, and she heartened the old men to fight like lads, and the lads to fight like warriors of thirty, and the women to fight like the Bashi Bazouks there were in my youth !

"But you look bewildered," she checked herself politely. "In a few words, Khanoum, it was the day when, our men being absent on a chappaw, she rode, alone and a stranger, into our court, and cried : ' Oh, ye women, and ye the old and the too-young of Kalmaru ! The enemy be upon ye ! ' And then—you have heard. The Gadarwands came, and she led us until the shot came that took half her hair and half her sight. Then she would remain by the loop-holes and urge us until we drove them off. Then she was ill, very ill indeed—her hair went white ere she recovered—and when she was well again the old Beg, my lord's grandfather, loved her, for all the scars, and made her his fourth wife."

"And her life before her coming ?" I hinted.

"Y'Allah. As soon as we had beaten off the Gadarwands our men returned, led by a Turkish lad, and this lad explained all, for she was too ill with her wounds to be troubled with explanations. She was, he said, of a family high in lineage, pure Hasanieh Seyyids, no less, but so reduced that she had no relations left saving one brother and their aged mother. And the mother, at her dying, bade them bear her body to Kerbela that it might rest near the dust of the blessed Imaum Hosain. To fulfil the promise they made on the Perspicuous Book they sold all they had to pay for the journey, trusting that Allah would grant the man fortune to make bread for both when their pious travelling was done. It was on their return towards Trebizond that their ill-fortune turned to our profit—by Grace of He

who is 'r Rahmani, 'r Rahim. As they fared near Kharlis, with the Turkish lad, Halet, as guide, they fell into the hands of the Gadarwands who were bound for our ill. The man the Gadarwands slew, flinging his body into the nearest stream, but, for her beauty's sake, they kept our Khanoum Effen' prisoner, putting her in ward in the ruined Khan, where they rested a while. They spoke freely before her, too, of their plans, and of where our men were. Now the lad Halet had escaped, but he returned and helped our Khanoum to get away. They secured two of the Gadarwands' horses, and the Khanoum, having pity for us and desire to avenge her brother, sent Halet to find our men, while she came herself to warn us. And how Allah sped her you know."

Chapter XI

ON THE TRACK OF THE TEN THOUSAND

THE unseasonable storm of yesterday was quite gone. When Miksi Gauriel brought round the horses, all splendidly fresh, we looked from the loop-holes of the elevated courtyard over an inspiring world compounded of even grey sky, powdered snow, and crisp air, below zero, it is true, but windless and exhilarating.

Our friend the foxing Gadarwand took his departure a while before we were ready. He bestowed thanks and blessings on the Khanoum Effen', as the Beg's proxy, and rode very ostentatiously due N.N.E. for Akhlat. The Khanoum Effen' gave me a smile when she caught me following him with my eyes. Her own said that, once he was out of sight of the Diz, it would be easy for him to turn due north-west with the brown track stamped by five hundred sets of hoofs not an hour ago plain guide in the dazzling whiteness to Kharlis.

Our own going was emotional. Esma wept on Evelyn's shoulder. and would not be comforted, though Evelyn's second-best watch had changed owners, the Georgians sobbed unrestrainedly, Lailah was dignified but depressed, all joined in bidding us come again soon and to bring our relatives and our friends, and our friends' friends, and Papa, and any new wives he might have taken to himself in the interim. When we came to say adieu to the Khanoum Effen' she shook her head. "I will see you through the secret passage," she said.

The others then wished to come too, but she bade them stay and mind the house, and, wrapping herself in a bearskin cloak, led us forth. The party consisted of ourselves, Ali and Zaid, well-grown, sulky-faced youths of fourteen and sixteen, each with a hawk on his wrist and a budding moustache very much on his mind, and four servants. The way was up the lip of the crater much to west of the Cleft. We rode as far as was possible until the path became a mere goat-track; there Miksi was blindfolded and taken in charge by Zaid, while Ali and the four retainers, who were afoot, pulled and hauled the five horses up the slippery blocks of frosted rock which paved the ascent.

We expressed our willingness to be blinded. "English ladies do not spy," returned the Khanoum Effen'. She led the way, on and on round projecting rocks, along foot-wide terraces, and cunningly between great boulders and the cliff they seemed to touch, until, quite unexpectedly, we found ourselves walking into what was apparently the mouth of a small cave.

"This is the point at which I could lead you into a trap," she whispered, as we waited for the others to join us.

"If you wished," I agreed, laughing.

"You do trust me then?" she demanded.

"Lead my sister and come behind me," I returned.

"Why do you trust me?" she pursued.

"Allah knows!" I replied candidly. "I do not!"

Ali lit a Persian lantern; by its glow the men and horses followed. The Khanoum Effen', needing no light, took us each by a hand and piloted us ahead through the pitch dark of the cave. It became evidently a tunnel presently; she took the light and showed us tool-marks on the rock-walls, behind the trickles of ice over them.

"Sultana Semiramis made all, Khanoum," Zaid volunteered.

I had expected it. Semiramis is, north of Amadiyeh, like Nimrod south of Eski Mosul: she made everything, from Hittite inscriptions to Rupenian Khans. "It is Assyrian," the Khanoum Effen' said in an undertone, and we dare not ask how she knew it.

We took a long time to traverse the length of the chilly, reverberating blackness. It was less cold towards the close, dipping steeply; quite unexpectedly we entered open day at the foot, almost, of the mountain, on a ledge blocked by a great boulder by which a spring emerged and trickled down beneath the tangled icicles hanging from the coarse grass along its margin. We scrambled down farther, a complicated way, until I could not have found the track back, and then Miksi was given the use of his eyes again.

"It is farewell time," our leader pronounced. "An hour's hard riding will take you—Inshallah!—to Bitfa, where your father will most likely be awaiting you, and if he is not there it is but two more hours' journey to Kochma. And the Kaimakam of Kochma is an old man and a discreet; his one wife is sister of my husband's grandson, the Beg, and with them ye can stay if your father is yet upon the road. And now," dropping her tone, "for your sad Feringhi salutation 'Good-bye!'"

"Our 'Good-bye!' does not mean 'Farewell for ever!' but 'God be with you until we meet again,'" I returned.

"Ah, verily, it is our 'Khuda Hafiz!'" she said. "Then—Good-bye!"

We offered our hands. She held both, and added with some wistfulness: "Thus it is young Feringhi maidens part from a woman friend, is it not?"

We kissed her in turn. "Good-bye!" she repeated,

and, turning abruptly, vanished amongst the rocks with the footmen.

Zaid and Ali led us on. "Who is she? What?" whispered my sister in English, Miksi being in the rear out of hearing. "Do you think, Rathia, she is a renegade Englishwoman?"

The suggestion annoyed me unaccountably. "Certainly not; she has not a drop of any but oriental blood in her. I can tell."

"Then where did she get her knowledge of English and English ways? Perhaps as a servant at some Consulate——"

"My good child, there are castes in the East. Our hostess is a gentlewoman as much as you are, or Aunt Domitia is."

"True, then it becomes a mystery——"

"About one thing there is no mystery, Evie. She has been very kind to us, and perhaps it is not in the best taste to try to pry into her private affairs."

"*Peccavi!* You are always right, Rathia; judicious fibbing, common courtesy, in everything like that you are always right. And, for another certainty, how lovely she must have been when she was young, almost as beautiful as you!"

I laughed at the engaging little wretch's flattery. "As she is, did you ever see a finer figure?" she went on. "Without the aid of a mirror I mean, Rathia. And her hands and feet are so small——"

She paused and drew off her left gauntlet, replacing it hurriedly on account of the temperature, but not before I spied a massive gold circlet and a wink of glowing blue on her third finger. "She gave it to me," she proceeded. "It's a Meccan turquoise. She took it off her own finger and it fits me, though I'm half a head shorter than she is. She told me not to let you see it until it was too late to return it, as English ladies have

such an objection to accepting presents. Do you mind if I keep it, dear ?”

Nobody could have minded with her big eyes coaxing. I answered : “ Certainly not. She seems to have taken a great fancy to you. It may be that is what saved us.”

Our conductors led us by a road twisting, deserted, but fairly open, and it was worth ten years of respectable life—that exhilarating gallop over fresh snow in an atmosphere of keen, windless cold. After two hours of it Evelyn drew my attention to the time. “ Did not the Khanoum say it was one hour’s ride to Bitfa ? ” she asked.

“ Orientals invariably either over- or under-estimate distances,” I replied, and called the question to Zaid.

“ Khanoum, it is nearer three hours’ ride, but would you have the Khanoum Effen’ dishearten you at the start ? ” was his reply.

“ Lend me your compass charm,” said Evelyn, when I translated. “ Is not Bitfa S.S.E. of Kalmaru ? We are riding due N.W.”

I questioned Zaid. “ Pek ala, pek ala ! ” he returned. “ My humbleness was born in this land, Khanoum. Presently the road bends, we will ride down on Bitfa as the kite swoops. Fear not, we will take care that ye come to Bitfa safely, by Allah al-Qawi-al Majid ! If ye doubt us ”—here he twirled as much of his moustache as was long enough to twirl—“ at least remember that if a hair falls from your heads we must answer to the Khanoum Effen’.”

“ She useth the rod, eh ? ” I suggested.

“ Nay, but she counteth the strokes as our father strikes,” he responded gravely.

“ We are now following the track of the Ten Thousand,” I informed Evelyn as we proceeded. “ You know——”

"What Ten Thousand? American Upper?" she demanded.

"Don't be silly, for once. You know, the Hellenic mercenaries who retired from Babylon to the Black Sea under Xenophon and——"

"That was before my time, and I do not care for the classics when I'm cold and hungry——"

"Cold? Just imagine those poor Hellenes marching this way, later in the year too, in nasty, chilly armour——"

"I'd rather not imagine anything of the sort."

"—and without so much as a single pair of fur-lined boots between their twenty thousand feet——"

"How much more awful if they had possessed a single pair! The horrors of internecine war for the possession of them would have been added to your Hellenes' plight!"

I gave up the attempt to infuse enthusiasm into her. The dear child always objected to having her mind improved. I have met with more loveable traits in other people, but not many.

We came, anon, to a tumbledown Seljouk khan, and camped in a weather-proof corner for lunch. Our entertainers of Kalmaru had equipped us with a new leather bag, which disgorged cold chicken, fruit and cakes, sweetmeats, Kurdish bread in flaps a yard wide by a yard long and a fifth of an inch thick, wrapped round everything, and a bottle of tolerable Armenian wine, for which I suspected the Khanoum Effen's forethought and the orthodoxy of the family in general. Presently I needed something out of my private bag; it proved heavier than usual; inside was a package that chinked. It was wrapped in a silk kerchief, pinned outside with a thorn was a slip of paper bearing this, in fine Arabic:

"A present for thee. Do not tighten mine heart by

a refusal. From Aminah, wife of the late Suttum Beg, the grandfather of Ischaryar Beg of Kalmaru."

"So the Khanoum Effen's name is Aminah, and that's her way of making you accept a present," said Evelyn, much pleased, when I translated. "You'll send her a nice note back, of course. Gracious, what a junk-shop collection!"

She absolutely sniffed as I opened the package; I myself was struck breathless. Miksi, who was waiting on us, forgot his manners and stood gaping at the little heap of cones and cylinders on my lap.

"Wealth of God!" said he. "Signet-seals!" And so began to examine them. In matters of Orientology we were no longer servant and mistress, but fellow-enthusiasts. "Asshur-Nazirpal!" he shrieked, as I handed them one by one. "Nabu-Apli—the rest illegible—unreadable; Ilu Ishtar—House of Mar Shimoun, these six, Rathia Khatoun, are Hittite!"

The two Kurds eyed us in surprise over two drumsticks. "It is a parting gift to me from your grandmother," I explained.

"They come from a hill near our home, we dig and find them, and good building bricks beside, and bones and shards," said Ali. "They are work of the Jinn-helped Kafirs of old time, and are excellent talismans against the Evil Eye."

"Votive cones and signets from the ruins of an Assyrian castle," I informed Evelyn. She listened politely, but preferred her own turquoise. In silence Miksi helped me to repack the bag; we handled it with reverence; it now contained treasure enough to make the reputation of a National Museum. I scribbled an Arabic note for the donor, and we took the road again in ecstasy.

The succeeding half-hour's ride threw Miksi into a fit

of musing. He peered about with the air of one who half-recognises a locality. At last Zaid and Ali abruptly spurred ahead to the top of a hill-track, reined up against the sky, and stared eagerly down the opposite slope. Miksi galloped after, took a look, and, standing in his stirrups with the mien of an ancient Seer in a Robinson Crusoe hat and peg-top trousers, broke into denunciation.

"Kupak agli!" he vociferated, shaking his crop at the Kurds, who gave him one grin and went back to their staring. "Sons of dogs! Burnt fathered ones—"

He proceeded to declare that our escort were no sons of our kindly host, Ischaryar Beg, but changelings born of Iblis's self and a lady ghoul in a lonely graveyard, the sleepers in the which all died of particularly unmentionable diseases. I spurred up, looked in turn, and let him proceed. It is refreshing at times to have somebody handy to say what you would like to say yourself. The good man's language fitted the occasion; he concluded with a pious hope that Allah would give Ali and Zaid the full quorum of spouses permitted by their religion, and that every one of the ladies would be of reputation to bring the blush of shame to the cheek of a Shiraz Mouti. He used his native tongue, then paused for breath and interpreted to Evelyn:

"Ya, Evelyn Khatoun, I was saying these are very bad-naughty boy-lads. I hope-trust they will be taken across their father's knee-lap and whipped-licked soundly. They have taken us out of the way in order to see the fight-shindy."

It was true; they had brought us in a circuitous way to the hills lining the east side of the road between Kharlis and Bitfa, and we had emerged at a point where we could see Kharlis, less than a mile away, in panorama over an opposite hill-foot.

Its single cupola and quartet of minarets glistened in

the winter sunshine ; over the squares of snow marking the roofs and the dark lines of narrow streets clustered round, all within the quadrangle boundary of the town wall. We could just see the Mission on its isolated eminence at the west end beyond the walls.

But the Kurds—the Gadarwand ? Into a gap between two of the hills backing the city a column was flowing, a narrow column straining up the slope from the Mission. A screen of shrubs concealed us ; we could observe unobserved. A black dot coming from the town revealed itself into a Kurd in a hurry before vanishing from sight somewhere beneath and to left of our station.

“ Allahu Akhbar ! ” cried Zaid, with impudence past answering. “ He hath deigned to make us go astray—and behold Kharlis ! ”

“ It seemeth to my foolishness that the beginning of the Bitfa road is where yon Gadarwand vanished,” said Ali. “ I will see.”

He flung the rein to his brother and slipped on foot through the bushes. Within five minutes he was back. “ Give Allah the glory ! ” he whispered. “ He brought us of His Wisdom. The kupak ogli who call themselves Gadarwand have received notice of our father’s riding. Those who were set before the town go to intercept him, and the messenger was sent to warn the keepers of the road to go take their place until they return. Our grandmother’s warning was good, they will not return ; as our father will be prepared. Ya Allah ’r Rashed ! Come, Khanoums, we know of a by-track by which we may meet our father before the battle ! ”

“ Ya’llah ! ” cried Zaid, pointing.

Muffled thunder rose to our ears. Craning, we could see, hidden ourselves by the bushes, to the entry of the Bitfa road, and from it streamed forth two or three score Kurds. With brandished guns and streaming

louns, rhythmic-thudding hoofs, and chiming harness, they galloped citywards. Ali and Zaid squirmed feverishly.

"We are for Bitfa, and the road is now open," I announced.

"Khanoum, we must go warn our father!"

"Then go alone!" I retorted, out of patience. "We can do without your guidance!"

"Not so, Khanoum. We promised the Khanoum Effen' to escort ye. Come with us, then will we go to Bitfa."

I scrawled on the outside of my note of thanks: "To Aminah Khanoum. For this escort we give thanks, but dismiss them, as we feel safer without them. Rathia Jerningham." "That will whiten your face with your grandmother, Zaid and Ali," I said, handing it over.

Zaid clutched it, mumbling thanks, and, without waiting for gifts, both cried a hasty Salam and fled up a by-way. I could not find fault with them; all the distaff side of me cries out to the joy of a well-fought fray, too.

Bitfa is at a much lower level than Kharlis. The road descended, and as it did so the snow tailed into slush, and that into pure thin mud farther on; the sun retired behind clouds and the crisp, high-altitude air changed to a raw mist through which we forged dismally into the deep valley that leads to Bitfa.

This was really a gorge cutting along between rocky walls which towered up on either hand into the fog, sometimes meeting overhead, an eerie, grey place; oddly silent, but for the click of our horse-hoofs, and made more weird by pines and fantastically twisted detached rocks louring through the murk like misshapen genii. The road was passable, however; we gave the horses their heads and indulged in a loping rush through the thinning mist, rocks and pines and

road-stones swinging into view out of the greyness ahead and gliding out of sight abreast of us, and the air singing gaily past our ears.

"This is better fun than Liver Brigade in the Row!" chuckled Evelyn.

We were out of the valley and the fog, in a road bordered by knobbed oak and dusky briars, before we slackened pace, and we did it then only because we were riding unexpectedly on the roofs of a cluster of half subterranean hovels which the Armenian owners dignified with the name of a Village.

The poor creatures tumbled up out of their dwellings, rabbit-way, and scuttled for the woods at first sight of us, but I threw back my pagri and spoke reassuring words, and they came back and said Bitfa was only half a mile farther on.

And added a solemn warning against our venturing into the town. It is, in fact, one of the most fanatical places in fanatical Kurdistan, basing its claims to eminence on the possession of a Shiah saint's tomb and an attached Medreseh full of Softas noted for their rooted objection to followers of any other religion. Few native Christians live in it, only one European, and no Jews. Our informants added more deterring facts, that Halet Bey, the Mutessariff, who was rather kind to Christians than otherwise, was absent, and that Miss —— of the Kharlis Mission had been stoned in the open Bazaar there not a week before.

This was serious. I regretted letting the young Kurds go. They would have been efficient protection; as it was, I did not wish to expose Evelyn to possible molestation and certain insult. Yet Papa might be waiting in the town. I called for a volunteer to bring news, and none appeared. These country Christians thought themselves well out of the place while the good Mutesariff was away

"Our papers will command respect," Evelyn suggested.

I felt for them doubtfully. I carried them in the breast pocket of my jacket. It was empty.

The jacket was belted. I felt down it and found nothing. The bulky packet could not have slipped through the belt.

My heart sank with a horrible dread. Was this the Khanoum Effen's doing; this refinement of vengeance—leaving two girls without the protection of official orders and support under the worse than helpless charge of a native Christian in a fanatic Moslem land?

Chapter XII

THE VIRTUOUS CITY OF BITFA

THE others took my discovery in unhelpful ways: Evelyn with the *sang froid* of ignorance, Miksi Gauriel with the abject terror of knowledge. In vain the pockets and bags of the entire party were emptied out on the bench in front of the Rayis's hut, the all-in-all documents had gone. We had not exhibited them at the Diz, but the hand that manipulated successfully the combination lock of my bag had doubtless gone through our pockets too. Rage past all articulation against the Khanoum Effen' rose in my mind; there was no time to indulge it, however, nor to puzzle out the problem of why she had placed the archæological treasures in my bag. Only the parallel of Joseph and Benjamin would come to me—and then Joseph loved Benjamin and did not owe him a grudge.

"Papa may be in Bitfa," I said. "Suppose, Miksi, we go and ask at the gate?"

"If he came it would be by the south gate, Khatoun; no good ask-inquiring at this north one."

"We will ride round the town, then, and ask at the south one."

"I dare not without our passports, Khatoun. We will be taken to the jail for suspicious-bad people. Turkish jail, Khatoun!"

"We will be taken before the proper officials."

"The Rayis here tells me the Mutessariff has left the

Chief of Police in charge, and the Chief of Police is bigoted and cruel. It is my advice we go on to Kochma; good-virtuous Kaimakam there."

"I do not fancy going on to Kochma when Papa may be here."

But Miksi was firm, and refused to enter Bitfa unprotected. "I presume it is not possible to procure the garb of a Moslema here, my sister?" I hinted to the wife of the Rayis.

She admitted that she sometimes paid visits to the town in the excellent disguise of a Moslem woman. We retired into the hovel, and, after some bargaining and dressing, with Evelyn for amused audience, I emerged transformed. A coarse blue and white checked sebleh, or sleeved cloak of ample dimensions, covered all save my face from crown to ankles; where my boots were replaced by a clumsy, high-heeled pair of much-stained yellow leather, and a black horsehair veil allowed nothing but my eyes to be seen. Miksi did not know me until I spoke.

"Now listen, Miksi," I said. "I am going into the town to ascertain if my father is there. If he is he will, of course, come to escort us in. If not, we must go on to Kochma. Wait here——"

"Wait?" said Evelyn.

"I will be an hour or two, perhaps. Meantime you will both wait here. By their account the good folk of the village are rarely troubled by Moslem visitors. Miksi, you will guard my sister——"

"By the Wealth of God and the House of Mar Shimoun!"

"Very good. O Rayis," to the headman, "ye will conceal the three horses. You, Evelyn, will stay concealed in the hut until I return."

"Your course-plan is the only possible-safe one, Khatoun," Miksi agreed.

"Indeed it is; the horses are tired with the detour, they must rest, you are safe here, and I might as well try and save us a possibly useless journey to Kochma."

Evelyn was dying to protest, but refrained and let me settle her in the hut which was hurriedly vacated for her. It was not a bad specimen, as Armenian huts go, I made her comfortable on a pile of rugs, advised her to take a rest, and, after a final hug from her and a renewed vow by the great Chaldæan formula from Miksi that he would not leave the doorway until my return, set out on my mission.

The village was hidden in a secluded turning; once the high-road was reached I dismissed the boy who acted as guide. The way was plain; soon a twist revealed Bitfa a few furlongs off: a ragged collection of houses struggling up and down the broken base of a hill. The sky was now overcast, the city, down in the lower ground, looked like a jumble of neglected tombs lightened by a jagged streak of river and the tarnished gilt dome of the Jami-Musjid.

I tottered down a slope and through the north gate, slouching after the manner of a respectable town Moslemah out of doors. It is not considered really nice for a Turkish townswoman to walk as though she possessed a spine or a single tendon Achillis. The gate was only occupied by a posse of beggars, a few down-at-heels Nizam on guard, and a pack of pariahs regaling themselves at the spot outside the arch where dead animals were buried overground.

It does me good to see a pariah enjoying a feed in the spot outside all Eastern city gates. When sanitation reaches the Orient what will the poor brutes do for a living?

The streets inside were fairly populous, but lacking the varied types of a larger town. Bitfa is a back-water place; the populace seemed to consist of a small

proportion of decent merchants and workers, a larger one of street-loafers, roughs of a type only to be found to perfection in Islamite towns with a claim to sanctity, a sprinkling of sleek Softas, some 'grubby dervishes, and a few Kurdish petty chieftains and their bodyguards; shaven-chinned lordlings, moustached, blue-eyed, and looking, with their hawks on wrist and close caps, like mediæval knights. No Christians were about, and few women.

Unable to glean any news of arrivals from the south at the north gate I asked my way to the Mutessariff's house. As I reached the gate of it a Muezzin from the highest minaret of the Jami-Musjid sounded the first note of the Azan for Salutu 'l Asr. Immediately the bell-notes were blending together from the other fanes:

"Allahu Akhbar! . . . Illahu 'l illa 'il lahu——"

All around me fell flat, Mecca-wards; even the warriors on guard clanked down. Bitfa is an unco' guid place. Discreetly I waited until the call was over, then proceeded quietly. I had unexpected luck with a woman who was leaving the Mutessariff's abode. She could inform me for certain that—praise Allah!—a Kafir Agha named Horne Jerningham had *not* defiled our town by entering it. Her brother had just come off duty at the south gate, hence her knowledge. To avert suspicion I said my brother was of the kafir's escort, then started north again. It must be Kochma that day.

The sole Bitfa European is an old Gascon who collects the excrescences known as *loupes* for a Paris firm. These *loupes* are found on the dwarf oaks, and nowhere else, and, come peace, come war, come Berlin Treaty Reforms, and come consequent massacres, our Gascon lives in the Troubled Land, and supplies his employers with the invaluable knobs to be sliced up thinly for expensive inlaying. I knew the old gentleman by repute—

good repute—and marked his house in the main square by token of the scowls bestowed on it by passing Softas.

It was a jail-like building; in a dreary courtyard girt with a high wall, the whole set a little up a slope and the wall-gate to be reached from the roadway by a steep stone stair. The villagers had told me the Gascon was absent, *loupe* collecting, or I would have sponged on him for escort for us all. I had nearly reached the house, stepping gingerly round the many praying figures, when, the service concluded, a stream of worshippers began to flow out of the Jami-Musjid porch into the square, the prayers on the pavement started to get up, and a great noise rent the quiet.

The cause came into the square from a side-street, a mixed mob hotly pursuing a small lad half dressed in rags, to the tune of the Turkish for “Stop, thief!” That part of the square was congested with loafers ripe for any kind of brutal row. They spread out to trap the quarry; but the child slipped between two of them, and, after a wild glare round, made straight for me, why, Heaven knows, tripped full length, shuffled along on his knees, and clung frantically to my skirt, clutching the while the sheet of bread he was holding

“Khanoum! Ya, Khanoum! For Allah ’r Rahman—for the God of Mercy’s sake!” he wailed. I lifted him up. He was Armenian; ten or so, by his height, but light enough, poor child, for six. The crowd massed opposite us. “Peace to you, my brethren!” I intoned. “I am from afar; tell me in mine ears: is it Bitfa fashion that a hundred grown men chase a child for diversion?”

A fat man with a floury face stood forth. “To you be peace likewise, O my sister!” he replied. “That is a thief, and his thieving is in his hand; I am a baker—Inshallah——”

"I was so hungry, Khanoum!" the boy cried. "It is hard to hunger with bread in reach——"

"Y'Allah! Shall a good Moslem be robbed of his stock and pinched by the Fingers of Penury because, forsooth, an Armenian hath an empty belly?" the fat baker demanded.

"One sheet of bread stolen will not ruin thee, Baker Effendi!" I replied. "Here, likewise, is more than the price, and do ye all let the lad be."

He caught, doubtfully, the silver coin I threw. A murmur rose behind him.

"O Baker Effendi, wilt thou for a beshlik condone that an Isauwi rob a Moslem?" a chorus ran. "Matches in thy beard! Thy face is blacked! Thou hast burnt thy father and thy mother! Let us take the thief before the Kadi. Is it not loss of a hand for him?"

The baker flung down the beshlik and stretched a hand towards my protégé. I twisted a corner of my veil round the little fellow's shoulders. "It is not loss of a hand for a stealer of bread, and a child at that!" I retorted. It was perfectly good Shara law, too.

The baker drew back. In Moslem lands it is both improper and a criminal act to touch the veil of a strange woman. The crowd raised a yell. "Tear off her veil, O baker!" shouted one. "It is no wrong to unveil a——"

He used a plain term. "I am a decent woman," I retorted.

"A decent Moslemah does not argue with strange men!" he shouted back.

"Well spoken!" howled the chorus. A voice added:

"She is an Armenian in disguise! Strip her!"

Still holding the boy and facing the enemy, I retreated until my shoulders touched masonry. "I am no Armenian," I declared.

"Swear to it!" was chorused. A silence waited my reply.

"I am no Armenian. I swear it as Allah is Allah!"

"Thou art a Moslemah? Swear to it!"

"I am a Moslemah, as truly as Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah!"

The ambiguity of the asseveration did not escape their oriental sharpness, and brought a fresh howl: "Strip her! She lieth! She hath laughed at our beards!"

"But she *may* be a Moslemah!" hesitated a semi-chorus.

Quietly I continued to hold the corner of the veil over the boy, knowing that the strip of haircloth was more protection to us both than the revolver I fingered behind it.

"Why do we not fling a few stones at the thief?" demanded a nimble-witted oaf, "as to the woman, no need to lay hand on her veil, but if she will not retire after fair warning and chance to be stoned likewise, we will afterwards—please Allah!—know all we will about her."

A shower of cobbles rapped around us.

Simultaneously a grinding noise sounded up the wall above. My elbow was seized in a masterful grip, and, before I could realise what was happening, we were run up the stair and stood in the court of the Gascon's house, while the Yourouk porter and a tall European slammed and locked the gate. A fusillade of stones clanked against it, succeeded by a tremendous hooting.

The European turned. "Thou art safe, by the grace of Allah, my sister," he said.

For full half a minute I did not answer. I could not. The voice which spoke thus, in appalling Turkish, was a high-pitched occidental voice, was known to me, and the speaker's features were familiar too.

My rescuer was the supercilious American of the Rue de Pera.

Chapter XIII

THE CHRISTENING OF MISS HAROUN AL-RASCHID

RECOVERING myself, "Let me go forth!" I screamed in a disguising falsetto. "It is not meet a Moslemah enter a Kafir's house!"

"It is not meet that a Kafir man leave a Moslemah to the mercy of a mob," the American returned, with exasperating calm.

There is antipathy at first sight, as well as love. I had felt it for him at our first meeting; at this second it was intensified by the aggravating fact that I owed my life to him. "Let me go, O foolish Kafir, son of a long line of foolish Kafirun and the father of foolish Kafirun yet to be!" I squealed ungratefully.

The noise was redoubling. Through the metal grille of the gate stones hurtled, the stout woodwork below quivered and thundered under blows accompanied by contradictory demands for the surrender of the shameless Moslemah who had entered a Kafir's house and for the death of the Kafir who had seized a Moslemah against her will. The porter scratched his eyebrow in perplexity, the American eyed the gate grimly. "In a little while they will leave, and thou canst depart," he said to me, civilly enough.

I sat down on a bench making no reply. The boy huddled on the pavement at my feet and began to eat the stolen bread. From the house a band of servants trooped, led by a greybeard steward.

"Effendi," the steward began, as spokesman, "the woman hath spoken words of truth. It is well she should be straightway turned out. Else will we, the Effendi's servants, together with your Highness, the Effendi's guest, be in danger."

"In your Effendi's absence I am master here," the American snapped. "Back to your tasks."

They hesitated; a gaudily dressed Syrian stepped forward. "Effendi, as your *tergiman*, it is my duty to instruct you in the ways of the country," he began. "This is a Shiah town; it is most necessary that the woman be turned out at once, even if she be of ill fame——"

"I am master here, Sergius," the American retorted. "No, not a word more; begone all!"

The servitors melted into the house again, whispering. "Allah is with the Effendi from Yenghi Dunia!" I heard.

In his turn the American went in. The boy fell asleep, still holding my skirt. No doubt about it, I had got myself into an unpleasant pickle. The worst was Evelyn at the village. I would wait a little while, then, if the mob had not dispersed, at worst I could declare myself for a European. It would probably mean police detention for the three of us, but we could survive it.

The noise went on without. The American came to the gate often, the porter was the image of fear personified. A thin rain began to fall. The noise subsided abruptly.

"Ya Effendi, there came a Mollah and spoke to the people; now some have gone away with him, but the most part wait quietly," the porter announced.

An hour passed. The porter went indoors, the boy woke and began to cry over a cut in his arm, inflicted during our recent lapidation. It had set in the cold; I

bandaged it. The American came for a look at the gate; he paused, watching, until I had done. "A neat piece of work, Madam," he said, in English, as I tied the last knot.

He eyed me provokingly. "No use denying it, Madame—or is it 'Miss,' or 'Mademoiselle,' or 'Fraü-lein' ? Your hands give you away. Likewise, the lace-edged handkerchief with which you have bound that cut in correct hospital style."

I could have cried with rage at my own foolishness. "What if I am European?" I asked, discarding further pretence.

"It may simplify matters. Perhaps. May I ask what you propose to do?"

"If I cannot get out quietly in a little while, I will demand the presence of the Chief of Police and confess I am European."

"You want to slip away quietly for preference? It's natural, but, my dear Madame, you forget I am a humble factor in the situation. All the servants ran away soon after your arrival; only a few minutes ago I was in bare time to slam and bolt the back gate behind the porter. You probably forget that if you slip away you will leave me with the reputation of having entertained a Moslemah."

"I'll show myself to the people at once," I said, rising.

"Too late," he replied. "You should have done it directly you came; now you'll probably be stoned. We must wait."

"It appears to me that if I choose to expose myself to the risk of stoning it is my own affair," I retorted. Further speech was cut short by authoritative blows on the gate.

The new-comer was a severe, white-turbaned Mollah, round him were a score of big, hangdog-faced Softas,

behind the mighty crowd that had assembled by the time, and now began the old calls: "Down with the Kafir!" "Death to the shameless Moslemah!"

The Kafir conversed with the Mollah through the trap of the gate, the Moslemah peeped over his shoulder. In reply to the holy man's exhortation the Kafir said:

"The woman is here for refuge from the men of Bitfa, the men of your teaching, O Mollah, who be spawn of Eblis and would have put her to death without cause."

"Thou liest, Kafir!" answered His Reverence. "The woman hath been in thy house many hours. Come forth, the twain of ye, and be judged."

"The woman breaks no law by her presence here," my not-too-willing cavalier replied shortly. "Thou sayest we must come forth, yet thou knowest we will be torn piecemeal or ever our feet cross the threshold. Not that we refuse to be judged; let the Chief of Police send an escort, and we will come to the judgment-seat. I have spoken. As Salamu alai-koum."

He slammed the trap. The reverend elder shuffled off, again stones clanked against the gate. "I will show myself before the Mollah has gone," I exclaimed, stepping to the gate and laying a hand on the bolt.

"You'll be stoned!" cried the American. "I paid no heed to his words, but fumbled with the rusty bolt. He caught the loose ends of my veil and twisted them together behind my back, pinioning my arms while he thrust the half-drawn bolt back again. Wild with rage, I struggled while he poured remonstrances into my ear. His grip would not relax; with an effort that made my ears sing and my eyes swim I burst the hem of the stout horsehair, and freed my arms for another dash at the gate. Thereupon he seized me round the waist.

I gave up the contest, moved by sight of my little Armenian, his pinched features transformed by a grin

of unutterable delight at the sight of a lady and Effendi of dignified Frankistan indulging in a bout of catch-as-catch-can.

"That's better," said the American, provokingly good-humoured now that the contest was over. "You were perilously near the brink of the undignified. You'll wait now until the local Bow Street and Vestry come in state, eh? Then I vote we go in out of the wet. You'll notice the crowd has grown quieter; they'll wait, too."

He led me into a room on the ground-floor, signing to the boy to remain in the passage. From the windows we could see the gate. The apartment was a man's room, all pipes and papers, tobacco-jars and sticks, the carpet rather less dirty than the chair-seats. On the walls were a dingy print of Taglioni, Ellsler, Cerito, and some other lady whose name was illegible from age and smoke, in the Pas de Quatre, and a Levantine Almanac which gave the birthdays of Christian saints and Moslem divines with large-minded impartiality. I settled myself in the chair which appeared to rejoice in the fewest number of muddy boot-marks. The American seemed undecided. "Won't you rest a bit?" I inquired.

He took a chair opposite to me. I looked round, counted the cobwebs in the nearest corner, and wished I could turn one of my Mosul servants into the room with a broom. The boy sat by the doorpost, meekly enacting gooseberry. I transferred my gaze to the Almanac and memorised some useful facts relating to Pir Dastagir, Francis of Assisi, Jelal 'd Din 'r Roumi, and Thomas à Becket. Then I looked at the American in due rotation. He was too self-possessed for my irritated feelings; I tried the infallible plan of looking dreamily at his boots. He had them under his chair, and spoke hurriedly.

"It is excessively hard for a man in full possession of his faculties to have to sit and wait for the Police to come for a spunky lady, without being able to help her," he said dismally.

"A woman trapesing about a Moslem town in disguise deserves all she gets," I replied judicially. "I am not groaning at my fate."

"I am," he retorted unexpectedly.

"Well, in a way it is your fault," I said viciously. "You brought me in. You might know better than to interfere in a Moslem street row——"

"I stand rebuked. In future I will remember to stand with my hands in my pockets while a woman is being murdered outside my gate. I speak Turkish in the picked-up-in-two-lessons style, and my knowledge of Eastern ways may be gauged from that. You, judging by your Turkish, might have been born in the purple at Yildiz Kiosk; you set me a good example of non-interference, didn't you?"

I coloured in the friendly shade of the veil, and, at a loss for words for once, turned my attention to the Almanac and impressed on my mind that we were living in Anno Hejira 13— and Anno Domini 189—simultaneously. "It would be, perhaps, more convenient if we knew how to address one another," my companion resumed, "I am Harvey N. Wilbur, and hail from Charlescott, South Carolina."

"United States of America?" I said inquiringly.

He looked a little put out. "Why, yes," he conceded. "I am a graduate of the University of South Carolina, and am travelling to collect stock for the University Museum. I meant to start for Diabekr to-morrow morning, but have doubts if I can manage, as my servants have bolted. And I have the pleasure of addressing——?"

"One feels so silly at introducing oneself," I pleaded.

"My name will be shouted over all Bitfa when the officials come. I have a fancy to keep it to myself until then."

"As you please. One thing is certain: I knew you were English directly I spotted that you were European."

"Only an Englishwoman would be capable of indulging in such an escapade?" I returned, curling myself more comfortably in the folds of my sebleh. "It happens I am only half-English. I am what is commonly known as Eurasian. That's why I ventured on this disguise. I know the ways of my kin on the distaff side."

"Oh," he was much astonished. "It appears that the English part of you forgets them at times, when its sympathy's roused. So your mother was a Turk?"

"An Abbasside," I returned sharply. "One of the family of the feudal lords of Amadiyeh."

"Amadiyeh? I've heard the hereditary Pashas of the place were descended from the Prophet's family by way of the Abbasside Khalifs."

"Exactly."

"Then I have the pleasure of entertaining a lady of slightly sacrosanct lineage? A sort of demi-semi-goddess in fact?" He began to laugh. He had a nice laugh, and I had to echo it. "Now I come to think of it, that darling of our youth, Haroun Al-Raschid, was an Abbasside. With your kind permission, I'll call you 'Miss Haroun Al-Raschid.'"

"It's properly 'r Rashed,'" I snubbed.

"Ah. And perhaps it may be properly 'Mrs.' Eh?"

"Who knows?" I replied. At that moment the crowd began to shout again. Whipping my veil closer, I led the way to the gate, and, encouraged by the cessation of stoning, opened the trap.

The rain had stopped, dusk was coming, faintly lit by the last rays of the dying sun. The square was crammed, but popular attention was diverted from us, for the while, to a spot across the sea of heads where mounted figures were slowly forging their way through a mobile lane made by the soldiers who preceded them, beating the populace aside with sheathed swords. The group came near enough for recognition: an old Mollah in Haj green and white, several other gentlemen of the pen and pulpit all mounted on mules, and a Turk of about five-and-thirty, clad in semi-military way, with a tail to his fez down to the back of his neck and a great deal of gold lace splashed over his suit. He was lifted high on a Cappadocian roan and surrounded by a ring of zaptieh.

"Halet Bey!" exclaimed Harvey Wilbur. "We are in luck, Miss Haroun; the Mutessariff is back unexpectedly."

"S'lam alai-koum, Wilbur Effen'," the Bey called as the zaptiehs beat a clear ring round the steps for the principals.

The American returned the greeting, and flung the gate open. The Bey and the clergy trooped in, the soldiers made a close ring round the foot of the steps. The people waited quietly now, seeing us trapped and arraigned in full view with the Governor in judgment on us.

The Mutessariff was good-looking in a prematurely portly way, as is the Turkish fashion. His moustache was spiky, his eyes sharp, his ears stood out considerably. At me he cast a worried look, not unfriendly on the whole, as he addressed Mr. Wilbur.

"Wilbur Effen', I have heard a strange tale," he began.

"That I have admitted into the house of my friend a woman whom some of the men of the city would

have slain without cause ?” the American replied quietly.

“That a Moslemah hath spent several hours in the house with thee,” the Bey corrected. “In strictness the case cometh within the judging of my excellent and revered friend, the Kadi.”

He indicated the elder in the green and white. Mr. Wilbur gave the worthy a polite bow. “I deny the accusation,” he said.

“With the woman beside thee !” the Kadi exclaimed. “Allah is with thee, Kafir. It is known that for many hours she has been alone with thee.”

“Not for many hours, Qatbu’d’din. Only for the short time she hath been compelled to remain lest the people should do her a mischief,” Mr. Wilbur corrected. “And not alone ; this lad here hath been with us all the time. He will tell you of her coming.”

“The length of time and the presence of the lad are, please Allah, of no importance to the matter,” the Kadi replied. “The one important fact is, thou hast blackened thy face by harbouring this Moslemah——”

“I am no Moslemah,” I interrupted.

Chapter XIV

UNCOVENANTED SUCCOUR

THE announcement took the assembly like a bombshell. "Not a Moslemah?" the Kadi cried.

From the listening crowd a hoot burst. "What a cold-faced lie!" a self-ordained fugleman bawled from the bottom of the steps.

I stepped under the gateway and faced them. "I am a Feringhi woman, and there is no wrong in my presence here!" I cried.

"We do not believe thee, daughter of a long line of liars!" was returned. Another speaker yelled: "Show thine accursed Feringhi face!" A stone caught me in the chest. The Bey stepped in front of me.

"Beat the people, my children!" he called to the soldiers. "And, O my people, I am Mutessariff here."

"Now, Moslemah or Feringhi, explain thy presence here in the ears of all," he added loudly, turning to me.

There was an expectant hush. A scribe produced paper and pen to take down all I said in evidence against me. "The rights of my seeking refuge in this house you can learn from the lad who accompanied me," I began. "Ask him and learn I am not lying."

"We will hear the boy," decreed the Mutessariff. But a shock awaited me; the Armenian, coyly averse to mixing with Moslem law, had decamped in the confusion.

"The lad was here when we came," the Kadi said. "That the woman saved him from righteous punishment is true and proven; it may be he hath fled to escape bearing evidence against her. Now of the matter of her identity, O Bey Effen'."

"Yes, verily, let us hear of thy name and business here, my sister," said the Bey. "Then, please Allah, thou shalt unveil before the people that they disperse in peace."

I hesitated. The official looked slightly embarrassed, the clergy fixed wolfish eyes on me. "But, Bey Effen', is it necessary the lady unveil and pronounce her name in public?" the American protested. "Your intelligence will perceive, Effen'—even a Feringhi lady hath her good name to keep fair."

"Then why doth she risk it by coming here in this disguise?" the Bey asked reasonably. "It is to my sorrow, but she must tell of her identity aloud before the Mollahs, and unveil, and swiftly, too, as the people wax impatient."

"Pray let all be done as the Mutessariff desires, Mr. Wilbur," I interposed. "You make it worse by acting as though we had something to conceal. O Bey Effen', and ye, reverend sirs"—here I raised my voice boldly—"I am called Miss Jerningham, daughter of one Sir Horne Jerningham, and a subject of the Sultana Victoria of England."

"Sir Horne?" the American observed *sotto voce*. "By Jove!"

"And of my business here, I have been travelling from Vastan to Kochma, expecting to meet my father either at that town or else here. I came by way of Mouschat, and, before entering this town, I found my necessary papers, my passport and my burguvuldu from the Vali of Van, were a-missing. And the rest of my party, being all Christians, feared to enter the town; but

I dreaded that we might miss my father in case he had reached here——”

And I gave a correct account of what had passed from the village onwards. The Mutessariff stroked his moustache uneasily. “Thy tale is fairly reasonable,” he said; “nevertheless, it is a pity thy papers are lost. I must put thee in ward, and bring the rest of thy party from the village thou hast mentioned to keep thee company until I can communicate with thy father and my superior the Vali of B——.”

“I would like nothing better, Bey Effen’,” I replied, thinking it best to put a cheerful face on it. “Of good and respectful treatment by thy subordinates I am certain, and I trust thou wilt send at once to Kochma to communicate with my father.”

“Lady, it is the will of our most gracious Lord the Padishah that Feringhis be well treated in his domains.”

“I thank thee, Bey Effen’. Also in private I will tell thee more fully of the party that accompanies me.”

“I thank thee, Khanoum, for putting no obstacles in the way of law. It chances the small company of soldiers without proceed to Kochma so soon as Allah permitteth us to soothe the people here, and the Yozbashi shall take my word to thy father. Now it but remains to prove to the people that thou art truly a Feringhi.”

“It cannot be avoided?” I hinted.

“To my regret, no. So far we have but thy statement. I will be reported to the most gracious Padishah as one who condoneth the breaking of law of Islam otherwise. Pray thee unveil now.”

I nodded assent. With a courteous gesture the Mutessariff bowed me to the gate. The Kadi followed, between them I stood at the head of the stairs, full in the light of torches and Persian lanterns held by some of the soldiers.

It was full dusk now, with a few stars in the dirty-

green sky. The steps were crowded with sowars, half carrying lights and half cocked rifles, a line of mounted Nizam two deep ringed the foot, ready to charge, if required, on the mob which hemmed them in and filled the square, fading out of sight by the Musjid. My view of the men of Bitfa is still a dark-tinted mass spangled with greyish faces; it hummed with angry murmurs, and at my appearance set up the most horrible noise the earth affords. I mean the dreadful snarling laugh, in unison, which only a Moslem crowd can raise, and that only to perfection when a woman is the butt. The Mutessariff raised a hand and silence ensued.

"Men of Bitfa, is this the woman concerning whom the uproar is made?" he demanded.

"Let us hear her voice!" demanded the fat baker from the front rank.

"Am I the woman, Baker Effendi?" I asked.

"Thou art the woman. We know thee by thy voice of Serafil and thy nature of Lilith the Shameless," he replied, and a hundred voices howled assent.

"And ye think I am a Moslemah?"

"Verily."

I flung back cloak and veil. I could not see the American, but a small, emotional yelp that sounded behind me as I stepped forward was unmistakably his tribute of surprise. "Verily?" I mocked.

"Subhan'llah," gulped a semi-chorus. "Allahu Akh-bar!" gasped the rest. Silence rippled down.

"It is true, the woman is a shameless Feringhi, child of a long line of noseless mothers," the baker said at last.

"Ghison Sefid!" bawled a smart Persian footboy. All who could see the joke guffawed. It was pointed at my hair. "White Curl," is the translation, a cant name given to any hard-up old woman who does any sort of go-between business as the only way to keep body and soul together.

“I am a Feringhi, one of the People of the Book, a follower of Nebbi 'Isa 'l Masiyeh, and a subject of Sultana Victoria of Frankistan,” I retorted, in a carrying voice. “And, ye men of Bitfa, I came hither in Moslemah garb knowing ye be sons of dogs and not good Muslims. Doth not An Nabi enjoin in the Perspicacious Book that all his followers shall show kindness to the neighbour who is a Moslem, and he who is not, and to children of the road?”

“Surah 4, Ayah 40,” murmured the Kadi, from habit.

“A subject of Sultana Victoria, my children!” cried the Mutessariff. “Run ye home with haste—Inshallah! ye have offered the lady some insult; a little more, and the Sultana will complain to our lord the Padishah—which Allah forbid, for our sakes who have offended!”

“We are satisfied, Ya Bey Effen’, our father!” cried a chorus. The baker announced, further: “Without doubt the woman is a pig-eating Kafir. She hath set us men of Bitfa by the ears; but we be satisfied. We do not wish to raise the ire of Sultana Victoria, and it is enough that the Feringhi Khanoum will—by Allah’s grace—burn in Laza hereafter, big Feringhi eyes and red Feringhi hair and all, together with her noseless female ancestors.”

“It is so!” echoed around, and a number of fancy biographies of my mother and aunts were bawled from different spots.

“The Khanoum is Jerningham Khanoum, a great and a kindly Hakim, the daughter of Sir Horne Jerningham Pasha, a great Pasha of Frankistan, and a virtuous and stainless maiden to boot!”

Thus a big voice in parade-ground tone as the officer in charge of the soldiers turned and marched up the steps. His back had been to me before. “O Veli Yozbashi!” I cried.

It was the good officer of Mouschat. "'Salam alei-koum Jerningham Khanoum," he returned.

"So thou knowest the Feringhi lady?" the Mutes-sariff asked, with palpable relief.

"Excellency, I do. Indeed, I know so much of her in a way that—please Allah!—I can hazard that her present difficulties are caused by the loss of her necessary travelling papers, the which she left by inadvertence and forgetfulness on part of us both, after I had examined them at Mouschat!"

And he gravely handed over a packet which I recognised, and at once passed over to the Mutessariff. Leaving the crowd to its disappointment, we went within and while the Mutessariff and the Kadi scanned the papers, the Yozbashi eagerly inquired of our adventures since we left the Onbashi. Over the subject of the said Onbashi he gave me a sly look and chuckled under his breath. "Your young sister wasted my gift," he said. "What of her? is she well after your journeying?"

So I told him our route, and where Evelyn and Miksi were, and he was helpful. He had just arrived in the town, and was to proceed with his men to Kochma on the Mutessariff's business; as soon as the trouble I had caused was done with, I could go with the party and we would pick up the other two *en route*.

But a difficulty cropped up. I could not possibly leave the house until the crowd had quite dispersed. The Mutessariff was quite satisfied with my credentials, so he professed, but he dare not anger the people by forcibly clearing them off, and feared that I would suffer maltreatment, for all his efforts, if I were seen. After due deliberation we found a compromise. The Yozbashi and his men would leave at once and make a detour to join Evelyn. I would give him a note enjoining her to go on with him. For myself, I refused the Mutes-sariff's offer of a night's hospitality in his harem and

accepted the alternative of two elderly and trusted zaptiehs as guard to Kochma as soon as it was practicable.

I then scribbled a note, and the good Yozbashi departed, leaving me to the officials. The Kadi went home also, carefully refraining from taking any notice of me as he bade all the others adieu; next the Mutessariff advanced to me.

"I will now bid you a temporary farewell, Miss Jerningham," he said in good English. "I must repair to my abode to transact necessary business, in a little while I will return, when the people are in less number and—please Allah—more tractable temper, and will escort you to the town gate. In the meanwhile I will leave a strong guard at the house-gate, and will pray your grace to accept some trifling gift of refreshments which my House will be anxious to send to you."

I thanked him. "I will accompany you, Bey Effendi, to see that your secretary gets my travelling papers into proper order against my leaving the town in the early morning," Harvey Wilbur put in. He had, with commendable delicacy, retired into the background since my unveiling.

"It may not be, Wilbur Effendi. You likewise will be in danger from the people. You must stay here until it is safe for you to start on your journey. The papers shall be sent."

"My presence will be offensive to the lady," Mr. Wilbur replied.

"Effendi, I must consider your safety. The respected Miss Jerningham will understand the necessity of your presence here, and on your part I cannot see that it is any hardship for you to endure her company."

It was the American who blushed furiously at the official's well-meant compliment. "I would sooner be

torn to pieces than stay here," he said. "My blood is on my own head, Bey Effendi."

The Bey shrugged despairing shoulders. I overlooked the offered hand of the American. He bowed silently. All the same I watched until I saw he was safe at the other side of the square. He was safe, the mob's rage being naturally hottest for the woman in the case.

Chapter XV

WITH THE REMNANT OF THE CHALDEES

By Salatu 'l Isha I was *en route* for Kochma. Besides a most excellent dinner, the Mutessariff's House—*anglice*, his wife—had sent me a litter wherein to get out of the city. That journey had been accomplished sans accident, with the Mutessariff and several zaptiehs on guard discreetly in the rear, and at the south gate we found Izzedin, the same soldier who had tried to escort us from Mouschat, waiting with Arjamand. The dear little mare broke tether to rub her nose against my face. I rolled up my Moslemah garb, bade farewell to the courteous official, and began the ten-mile ride.

The road ran, deserted and dreary, through a dismal prospect of rocky plain and half-frozen rivulets bounded by mist-topped hills and dusk mountains, the whole bathed in a last, ugly, unwholesome-looking purple after-glow. Once in the saddle, I realised I was tired; it was all I could do to stick on the mare's back. Izzedin rode beside me, the two policemen behind.

I believe in Fate. Five miles from Bitfa, and from anywhere else worth calling Anywhere, the horse of one of the zaptiehs went over, thanks to a hole in the road. Izzedin got it up uninjured, but the rider lay in the mud until we raised him, and I found his head was badly hurt. I brought him round, but he was incapable of riding, and evidently needed skilled attention. We could not take him with us; the road from

Bitfa so far had been one of the best in Turkey, but a little farther on exceptionally bad tracks began. Izzedin had a most important despatch to take on to Kochma, and did not like to go back; neither did I. In the end the other zaptieh mounted the strongest horse and took his comrade in front for return, and I went on with the soldier. The spare horse Izzedin led, as the man encumbered with the injured one could not manage it.

"Please Allah, we will reach Kochma in an hour and a half," said Izzedin. I echoed, "Inshallah!" But it was not to be. Within the half-hour, as we were taking a short cut along a real Kurdish road, a narrow shelf on the face of perpendicular rocks with a reedy brook tumbling along a hundred feet below, I let Arjamand stumble and the result was a nasty spill.

"O Allah, Allah, Khanoum, you should have consulted an astrologer before you went journeying this month!" exclaimed Izzedin, as he pulled the little mare off me. "Hath Allah pleased to let you be hurt?"

"No bones broken, my son," I replied, clinging to the rock, for I was much shaken and my left knee hurt oddly. "But behold the poor hajin's knees!"

They were cut nastily. "She cannot reach Kochma before morning," the soldier said in despair. "Y'Allah, somebody has cast the Evil Eye on your journeying, Effendina. We will transfer your one-sided saddle to the other horse; but what of the mare?"

He reflected, then remembered that about half a mile off the track was a Chaldæan village, named Sliwa Klissia, where we could leave our injured for the night. I found we would have to include me in the casualty list; I could scarcely mount, and had to cling to the horse's mane and the saddle. "I must stay at this village, too," I decided.

We arranged it as we forged on. For sake of his

despatch, and to allay Papa's anxiety Izzedin must go on. I would come to no harm by myself in a Christian place; native Christians would stand in awe of any one under Government favour, and Kurds dare not harm a European. Izzedin wished to advise Papa to send an expedition directly he arrived with the news. I negatived it. With his injured leg the poor man would need a night's rest. As we came to that conclusion we started to cross a wicker bridge, a fearful thing to negotiate with the starlight rippling dismally on the black water several yards below. "Y'Allah, what is that, Effen'?" the soldier asked suddenly as we reached the farther side.

He indicated a white moving blot on the stream. The bank sloping at that side, I sent him down, and he drew the floating thing to shore, where it lay in the ooze, the nude body of a woman of about my own age.

"Nothing for me to do here, Izzedin," I pronounced, after an examination.

"From the Percussion of the Grave and from the Questioning of the Grave may Allah deliver her!" the warrior replied piously. "That is, unless she was a Christian," he added.

I thought, from general indications, that she was a Chaldæan. "And, on my faith, I cannot understand this, Izzedin, my son," I added. "There is no mark of violence, yet this poor creature was not drowned; she must have died before she was placed in the stream."

In Kurdistan one grew hardened to finding bodies by the roadside, even in pre-massacre days, and to understand the technical signs of different ways of dying. "Kim belar, Effen'?" Izzedin made reply casually. "Allah is Great and All-seeing."

He seemed to think that explained all. I laid the poor soul's drenched auburn tresses straight over her shoulders, we wrapped her in my sebleh, hid her under

some bushes, and went on. The road now ascended; in bitter cold we reached Sliwa Klissia. It was a large village, the huts straggled about the foot of a hill, mostly half hollowed in the slope. On a kind of promontory, whose base was washed at one side by a wide, foaming rivulet and half-encircled at the other by the churchyard, stood the church.

To welcome us there turned out a dozen starved curs, two men, and an elderly woman. You could tell that we had crossed the border between Armenian and Chaldean districts by the woman's lack of the abominable Armenian veiling, an article which suggests chronic neuralgia or a desire to hide leper-marks. These three were the Rayis, his wife, and his son. "The Khanoum is very welcome," the Rayis said. But he looked a little wry.

"By thy salt, Christian, I look to it that thou see that thy miserable Christian villagers treat the exalted Effen' as she were the Amiru 'l Muamin's self. She is of his acquaintance and his honouring, and if ill befall her—Allah, I will be almost sorry at the doing of what will be done to thee and all of thy wretched Christian following."

Thus Izzedin, with a Bobadil air which would have set me laughing but for its terrifying effect on the natives. The Rayis cringed. "Ya, Bimbashi, your words are law. We will guard the exalted lady well—by the Head of Mar Shimoun! A body by the bridge, you say? Alas, bodies are plentiful as round stones!"

Izzedin saluted me and rode away. My hosts conducted me to the main room of their house. It was half-subterranean and bare as a barn, though the blankness was a little hidden by the billows of smoke rolling from the fire in the middle of the floor. It was a place that kept you coughing all the time. I sat on my doubled-up coat, found my entertainers had seen two English-

men once and knew what Europeans were like, and so got their confidence. It was a dreary story they had to tell: the village had been raided again and again by the Walwand Kurds from over the hills, and the marauders had not only taken the winter's supply of food and raided the cattle, but had amused themselves by making a bonfire of all the villagers' farming implements. They begged me to bear the tale when I could to that one hope (at the date) of the Christian in Kurdistan, the British Consul at Van, and informed me that the rest of the villagers had not yet returned from their daily gathering of acorns, which were being collected to grind into meal and keep off starvation during the coming cold weather. She further offered me acorn cakes, all the provision the place boasted, and said that several children had already died for lack of proper food.

"And there's worse coming, mayhap!" sighed her husband. "We are in the ill-grace of Nimroud of the House of Mar Shimoun."

You must understand that they had become very confidential by that time, and told me openly, in whispers, what was only known with certainty some years afterwards. Nimroud, brother of Mar Shimoun, aimed at becoming Catholicos, and had begun to run a pretty course of intrigue, underhand currying of favour with the Turks, and general despicable treachery all round. He was inducing the Chaldæan Bishops and priests to take his side as far as he could, and plotting to get those who remained loyal to the rightful hereditary head, temporal and spiritual, of the Eastern Christians, into trouble with the Moslem authorities. Kasha Sergius of Sliwa Klissia had stuck to the true Catholicos, and lived with his flock in daily fear of the rebel indulging in some mean trick to get them into trouble.

"Listen to the tale of Dizbekir, Effen'," the Rayis

said. "The Turks have an idea that all the Christians in Kurdistan are arming in secret for a general rising. You know what was at Erzeroum?"

I nodded. At that time, before the doings at Bitlis, Van, and Orfa, people thought the slaughter of Armenians that followed the search for arms in Erzeroum Cathedral worth calling a massacre.

"Well, Effen', Dizbekir is a village not far from here. Of late the Turks have taken to stopping Christian funerals to search the very coffins for arms, and at Dizbekir they found a handful of cartridges in that of a man going to his burial. And for that they slew all the folk of Dizbekir, and the Kurds with them——"

She told me plainly what the Kurds did on the altar at the harried village. "And men say the cartridges were dropped into the coffin by one of Nimroud's agents, and that he further gave the Moslems a hint about searching, because the Kasha of Dizbekir was for Mar Shimoun—whom God preserve!" the son supplemented gloomily. "Indeed, between Nimroud and the Kurds, how are we to live? Ten years ago we could have done honour to a guest from far-off Frankistan; now the coming of one fills us with apprehension."

"So my presence is unwelcome?" I asked in surprise.

"'Stafar'llah! I meant not that——"

"Lie not from politeness," I returned. "I am thy fellow-Christian; tell me plainly, my brother."

"The presence of the Khanoum is exceedingly welcome," his father took on him to explain; "but after she is gone on—look you, the Kurds will hear of her coming, and will come to us seeking a pretext for ill-usage. 'Ye be bad folk and spawn of Iblis,' they will say. 'Ye say ye have nothing left to give us, yet ye entertained a great Feringhi Khanoum for the night.' Indeed, Effen', their raids have not left us so

much as a bench to sit on ; but when we tell them so they will retort : ‘ Ye burn your fathers with lies ! Feringhi folk require things of the cleanest and best ; tell us, then, where be your store of fine white flour and the goodly rugs on the which she slept ? ’ And when we can give them nothing they will beat, and, mayhap, kill us.”

This, I knew, was probably truth. I did not see how I could go on, yet could scarcely expose the whole village to maltreatment and insult for my sake. “ I will rest and warm myself a while, my father, then thy son shall guide me on to Kochma,” I said.

“ God forbid you should think such a thought of us ! ” the woman protested in horror, “ To turn out a guest ! This is what you might do to secure our safety at expense of a few minutes’ walk. There is a secret place a little up the hillside where we keep a few sheep and one horse yet safe ; my son shall take your mare there and stay with it, and you shall accompany him as far as the nearest trees, so that if spies are about we can swear we saw you on the road to Kochma with him. But in the tree shade do you slip on your big hooded cloak and return, and I will let you into the church. It is a poor place, but no worse or barer than this house ; and, as evening prayers have been said, you will have it to yourself for the night.”

“ And in the morning ? ”

“ The morning prayers will be said very early, after then you can slip out ; disguised in a cloak I will bring you, and go to the wood, where my son will meet you with the mare. So you can come back with a tale of having lost the way and hiding in a cave—there be many near—all night.”

“ And by that time my father will be here. Good. Will ye initiate the rest of the village into the secret ? ”

“ Three be enough to keep a secret, Effen’. We will

tell the Kasha after, but to the others and the Kurds it will be you found no entertainment fit for you, and so insisted on pushing on."

"The Kasha is out acorn-gathering?"

"Nay, with a few men he hath gone to fetch the body of my sister, who hath died at a distant village, home for burial. They went in the morning, and will return in the night, perhaps, for fear of leaving us too long lacking so many men. It may be they will bring the body into the church while you are there, but you will not fear?"

I reassured her on that score, and consented to the plan with one amended detail. In my pig-headedness I would think myself capable of getting to Kochma by moonlight alone on the strength of a description of the way. It would be like my usual way, I told them. I would say I dispensed with a guide from a knowledge of the protection a native Christian was likely to be. Of course I did not try the thankless and embarrassing task of pointing out that the son, Ishu, was stalwart, comely, and just twenty-three; and not the person I would like to be connected with in a night's *tête-à-tête* adventures.

Presently, having kissed Arjamand "Good night" on her silky muzzle, I was stumbling over the graves in the delusive moonlight. A flight of steps cut in the rock led to the holy edifice. A high outer wall encircled a small courtyard in which services were conducted in hot weather; at the end of the enclosure, on the edge of the promontory and overhanging the stream, was the church. The headman's wife awaited me. I stumbled wearily up the stair after her and through the wall-gateway, which, like the entrance to the church itself, was only about a yard square, a characteristic feature of Christian churches in Kurdistan, the motive of it being to compel all to bow their heads on entering

the House of God and to checkmate the playful Turko-Kurdish habit of stabling animals in the sacred edifice. The Rayis met us in the chilly court and conducted us into the cold darkness of the church, where he borrowed my matches and lit a screwed wax taper.

By its feeble glimmer the edifice stood revealed, a barn-like oblong some twenty-five feet wide by thirty long, the latter measurement including the mud daïs on which stood the rough altar with its Manchester cotton cover and discoloured silver candlesticks, flanking a tattered but magnificently illuminated old copy of the Gospels. Mud pillars supported the roof, and two dumpy arches led into small annexed rooms, one, filled in with a door, into the sacristy, where the priest made and baked the Communion wafers; the other, an open one, into the combined vestry and baptistery, a cubby-hole about seven feet square, cut down the middle nearly from wall to wall by a narrow, high, stone font.

We all kissed the little wooden cross on the altar. "And ye do not deem it wrong I stay here, my father?" I asked.

"The wrong would be for a Christian wayfarer to go unsheltered while God's house possesses a roof, Effen'," he replied, and indeed the building had a roof that was better kept than anything else about it. Chaldæan churches have to be re-consecrated if a drop of rain gets in. He went round with the taper. "Behold, there is nobody here saving ourselves. The place is the Khanoum's; only please to remember not to enter the sacristy."

"I will; I have no wish to become a Christian nun. It is in these hard days better to be a Feringhi lady."

The etiquette is that nobody but the priest may go into the sacristy, and for a woman to enter it is equivalent to taking the veil. My two hearers agreed with my

dictum, and, after kissing the cross and my hand, departed. The door clanged to and I was alone.

It was eerie, the taper only furnishing a glimmer for a little way in the darkness; the place seemed a mile square, and the two cruciform slits in the wall over the river which served for ventilation let in an abominable draught wherever one moved to escape it. The romance of the situation was lost on me; I wished Evelyn had been with me. She would have enjoyed it, and would have been antidote to the uncomfortable feeling of awe you cannot help experiencing when alone in the dark in a place where prayers have been felt and uttered by dead and gone and living hundreds. I looked over the illuminations, said my prayers at the altar-foot, and took the light in hand to find the best resting-place.

I pitched on the space between the font and the back wall. The small baptistery felt less uncannily sacred than the bigger main building, also I would be hidden from the morning congregation there, and in case of nocturnal alarm could sit up and command the whole place with my revolver. I put out the light, and, although it was bitterly cold and it is not very comfortable to lie on a hard stone floor with only your arm for pillow, I was so tired that I had scarcely squeezed myself, wrapped in the sheepskin coat, in the narrow space, than I was sound asleep.

Chapter XVI

LYING IN STATE

A NOISE of trampling feet and subdued voices, accompanied by the opening of the church door and the admission of a bitter draught, aroused me. Next moment I had my revolver cocked, and was sitting up in the chill darkness.

These were no sneaking marauders, they made too much racket. Could they be Kurds come to desecrate the church? By sound of their footsteps half a dozen had come in, two with tapers followed, and by the faint glimmer that danced amidst the dark figures I could see that each in turn bent over the cross on the altar. They were Christians. My repeater beat three times when I tried it, and that made the puzzle: it was too early for morning prayers.

The solution came apace. A tall man, wearing the white alb and dark stole of a priest, entered, and after him something was pushed and hauled through the doorway. It was Kasha Sergius and his followers bringing home the coffin. My acquaintance, Ishu, was now assisting in the alb, with big coloured crosses on it, of a deacon. The probability was he had not yet had a chance to inform the priest of my presence. I lay down again.

The coffin was placed on the floor of the nave, and two women came in to watch it. When the others were turning to leave the noise of a great outcry from

the village drifted through the doorway, and a man bawled from the outer stair :

"Kasha, our father ! Here's Turk soldiers come, and saying they must search the place for arms !"

The voice ceased, the speaker, from auricular evidence, was thrust aside, and another figure stepped in with a clicking of boot-heels. Several candles were now alight, and I made out the new arrival for a Colonel of Nizam. He was a dapper little man of sixty or so ; after him came a tall man in European costume. I quite expected it this time. Harvey Wilbur again.

Making a gesture of respect towards the coffin, the officer spoke courteously. "Kasha Sergius of this village, Sliwa Klissia ? Peace be with thee, and with all dutiful subjects of our lord the Padishah ! I have orders to search for arms, and have brought with me fifty soldiers for the purpose. I request that thou wilt bid thy flock to help and not hinder."

"Bimbashi Effen', it is not every Osmanli who wastes civility on a Christian," answered the Kasha, bowing.

"Ye be people of the book," the officer replied. "I have no quarrel with ye, only if we light on hidden arms—by the glory of Allah, I am the least of the Padishah's servants !"

"We are at your command, Effen', having nothing to conceal."

"Chok yakshi. If it be so, the face of thy village will be whitened before all Kurdistan. And to it will bear witness this most distinguished Effen' from the land of Yenghi Dunia. Wilbur Effen', this is the Kasha."

The Kasha cringed. Mr. Wilbur bowed stiffly. I should have come forward at that point, but I did not. It was a foolish thing to do, but people waked in the small hours after a tiring day are not apt to be in possession of the best of their wits. My one idea for the

time was a stunning, overpowering objection to making a second dramatic claim, within twelve hours, on the American's protection. I would rather have died on the spot. Anyhow, since the Kasha did not yet know of my whereabouts, those in the secret having probably forgotten me for the moment in the new excitement, I would wait a while and send some one to tell the Bimbashi alone of my presence.

"Shamasha Ishu, and thou, Shamasha Ovanes, do ye bear the sister and the niece of the dead company. The rest of ye, my children, come with me," the priest ordered.

"Two women and two men to watch. It is well." The Bimbashi went round the place with a taper; I shrank behind the font, and escaped his eye, though he looked round keenly. 'This was well enough; I would simply tell Ishu and the others to hold their tongues and all would be settled. "Four in the church," he repeated. "I will, please Allah, set a sentry that none may pass in or out unobserved."

"I pray you, Effen', let your man mount guard in the court. You perceive there is but one door," the priest begged meekly.

"Pek ala. A man in the court can watch both church door and wall door," the officer answered. Then he went out with all but the four watchers, and the door slammed to.

The four left consisted of Deacon Ishu, his father, the Rayis, also in deacon's array, his mother, and a young girl. "The Turks are fools, by the Wealth of God and the House of Mar Shimoun!" said the elder Deacon explosively. "If we had arms, would we let ourselves be thus robbed by the Kurds, I pray?"

"It is a plot for an excuse to fall on us!" answered Ishu; and the girl put in:

"It will fail, for the Effen' from Yenghi Dunia will

bear witness that we be innocent. My mother, in their haste the men did not take trouble to place the coffin in the proper place. Shall we not, I pray, move it before the altar?"

"Well said," replied Ishu, and the men lifted the coffin and carried it a few feet forward.

As they did so a short, sharp tap sounded from it.

The others did not hear it. I gave them a moment, then stepped out of concealment.

The girl cried out. "Be silent," Ishu exhorted. "This is but the Khanoum; no ghost nor spy, but a wayfarer put here by my father and mother. By the Head of Mar Shimoun, Khanoum, and Allah my witness, we had clean forgotten thee in the excitement of the coffin's coming and the Turks' coming. And my father and my mother, how are we to explain her presence to the Turks——"

"We will speak of myself in a breath, my friends," I said. "I heard a sound from the coffin. Let us open it straightway; we have heard of folk who were as the dead while still alive."

"A sound from the coffin? You mistake, Khanoum——"

"Not so. I have dog's ears. To work now, if the woman is alive every moment counts."

I proceeded to attack the nails with my knife. Orientals obey Europeans by instinct in a crisis. The men had left their daggers in the porch, as is customary; Ishu took the knife, and in a minute the flimsy lid was off, revealing neat folds of coarse linen. I leant over and felt for my medicine-case, while the woman turned down the upper folds and revealed—no corpse or live woman, but, padded in neatly, several Sniders, two old-fashioned matchlocks, five revolvers, and rolls of cartridges stuffed between.

The elder man raised his hands in a gesture of despair.

"Be our witness, Khanoum, this is none of our doing!" he cried. "Some enemy hath done this, that the Turks may fall upon us—by the Wealth of God I understand it now! While the carrying party passed through the village Mishlu the men thereof would have them rest, placing the coffin in their church the while. Mishlu is for Nimroud—it is explained!"

"And the body—my sister's body!" wailed the woman.

"Alas, my aunt!" the girl wailed.

"If thy sister was red-haired, they flung the body into the river, and ye know where to find it," I replied. "Meanwhile we must think of the living, not the dead!"

"The yet living!" groaned Ishu. "We will all be dead soon," supplemented his father.

"Soon is not Now. Also, Allah is not an Albanian." I administered the Asiatic Turkish for "Things might be worse," as I sat on a corner of the coffin and examined the guns. "If we got rid of the arms——"

"Effen', the soldier guards the door."

"Even so," I nodded. "The windows? But a child could not creep through them. You, my brothers, might conceal them under your albs, and convey them out—but the guard will grow suspicious if ye pass in and out too often. We might push them through the windows into the river——"

"The splashes, Effen'!"

"Yes. It will not do. Besides, we must consider the questions of the emptied coffin and my presence."

"We might fill it with stones from the pavement?" Ishu hazarded.

"Listen to Khoja Nasreddin of Konia!" I named the Turkish Handy Andy. "My presence should have been revealed at once; now I will be suspected of Allah knows what."

"Shall we call the Bimbashi, show the guns and the

Khanoum, and speak full truth concerning all?" the Rayis suggested.

"He will see ye were driven to it," I returned. "What is necessary is that I disappear, and that the coffin holds a body."

"Does the Effen' mean that we should slay one of the women here present for the body?" The Rayis asked it seriously. "Truly, it would be a great sin, and the sentinel would notice if one of them were a-missing."

Ishu had nothing to suggest, nor had his mother. As to the girl, she was practically stunned by the danger, and the wonder of my appearing.

"The proverb that it takes two Jews to cheat one Chaldæan was not made concerning ye men of Sliwa Klissia," I returned. "If any must be slain—why, obviously it should be myself. Now, will ye obey me? And, tell me, is not aught better than submission?"

They fixed eager eyes on me, and nodded to both questions. "All Feringhis are mad," I quoted again. "But, even as Omar's whip was more to be feared than another's sword, so is the madness of a Feringhi of more avail than the wisdom of Turk or Nestorian."

The test was effectual. I had impressed them to such a degree that they took no heed of the abhorred denomination. I bade them then keep watch and ward while I made a few preparations in the baptistery, lest the sentry should look in and find them in suspicious attitudes. So they kept watch, and their shadows danced on the wall with the shivering of their fear.

I am not sure that I did not give the impression that my retirement was for silent prayer; in reality it was to adjust my costume. I reduced it to my skirt and jacket in the main, and it was nasty work walking barefoot on the stone floor.

The four gasped when I reappeared, but I froze them

into silence with a glance, and bade the girl station herself near the door to give a possible alarm, while the others tore up linen into strips and knotted these together. Meanwhile I wrapped up the guns, several in the sheepskin coat, two in my pagri, and so forth. Then I dragged the coffin under the windows, mounted it, and contrived to get my head through the cross-slit.

The look of things outside was satisfactory. It was the dark hour before dawn, and the river at the wall base was roaring in autumn flood. I hitched a linen cord to the bundle in the fur, thrust it out, and lowered it to the full length of its tether before letting go. It made no perceptible splash and the wrappings kept the metal from clattering against the wall. We sent the other bundles after. My helpers muttered prayers of gratitude and kissed my feet.

"But there is the coffin yet," desponded the woman, who was named Marta. "What, also, can we say of the Effen's presence? And she will freeze."

The others groaned. "I will not freeze when you have wrapped the shroud round me," I replied. "And I could not be crammed into the coffin with all my clothes on."

"What was the wisdom of Asaf and of Suleiman to that of the Effen'?" cried Ovanes. "To act the corpse——"

"Until the search is done and the real body can be smuggled in from the river," I supplemented. "Hand up those, I pray."

I referred to my boots. We had stuffed them with revolvers and cartridges; once they were out the church was well rid of contraband arms and European clothing, only to fill the coffin remained.

The girl was set on guard, the men drilled holes in the coffin-lid, Marta let down my hair and plaited and looped it in the local fashion, while I made up my face

to a judicious pallor with the aid of a pocket mirror and a *papier poudre* book.

Then Marta laid me out tidily. She smiled over it a little; the humour of it struck her. The men grinned. The Chaldæan is a bellicose race; under similar conditions Armenians would have been limp with dread. They strapped me in the shroud, and, as it was a little scant for my size, they left my hands and feet out. Fortunately, I go pale blue with cold; Marta touched up the exposed ends of my person with what was left of the papers before throwing them out of the window, and all decided I would pass muster by candle-light. We relied on it that the Turks would not let any one else in while they examined the church, if it did come to an examination. The coffin was a tight fit, but with the lid on I could still breathe comfortably; the nails were pushed into their sockets, and I was in the dark but for a few lines of brightness where the planks joined badly.

We had scarcely done when the door creaked open. My chinks of light wavered as the candles flickered in the draught, the far-off voice of the sentry observed that, please Allah, people might go into the church if they chose, his orders were to search all coming out. One person stepped in and the door slammed.

"We will prepare for morning service, my children——" began the voice of the Kasha.

Ovanes responded in a fierce whisper. For several minutes whispering went on. "A plot of Nimroud's?" repeated the priest at the end. "The Khanoum who passed the village in the coffin?"

More rapid explanations pattered out. The priest was a man of nerve and quickness. "Is all well with thee, Khanoum?" he asked.

"Very well, Kasha Effen'," I replied sharply as his inquiry drifted through the cracks. "Go on with the

service preparations; there is no time for talk, and remember the sentry."

"Khanoum, we owe you eternal gratitude, we and all our families. We will carry you on our heads, we will kiss your feet, and smooth your brow for our salvation——"

"Pek ala," said I. "But get on with the preparations."

After some shuffling about a booming, resonant noise roared out, the summons to prayer sounded, after the Chaldæan way, by means of the most muscular of the deacons attacking a board, set between two posts, with a mallet. It is called the Nagushah. Pursuant to its clamour the door again squealed open, and a number of booted and spurred feet tramped in to the accompaniment of rifle-butts sharply grounded on the stones.

"Kasha, we have searched all the houses, and have found this place guiltless so far. Now we will, before the worshippers enter, examine this place, Allah willing," announced the Bimbashi.

And the priest replied cheerfully, "So do, Effen'."

Followed a confused noise as the soldiers tramped about, ransacking the edifice. One stumbled against my resting-place, and threw a grumbling curse at it and its contents. I could hear them tapping for hollows, shaking the altar, and racketing about generally. At times I heard the American's voice speaking with the Kasha. After a quarter of an hour or so the soldiers all came to attention.

"Nothing found," muttered the officer in a puzzled tone. "Yet our information—— Open the coffin."

I shut my eyes and struggled with an insane desire to open them again as a bayonet was thrust under the lid and began to prise it off. Marta lifted her voice in lamentation over this ill-usage of a Christian corpse.

The lid was wrenched away, a rush of cold air ran over me.

"A corpse truly," said the Bimbashi, and I felt the light of a candle held close to my face.

"By Al Qawi, a lovely woman too, Wilbur Effen'," he added. I heard the American's voice make a vague murmur, somewhat far away. Evidently, for my comfort, he had the civilised man's horror of the dead.

"Yet our information——" the officer proceeded, still *sotto voce*. "Take out the body."

My blood ran cold. Marta came to the fore gallantly, her shadow fell most gratefully over my face as she interposed herself over the coffin and pleaded in broken accents. That the coffin should be searched was fitting, so she said, but let not the body of her sister be given over to callous soldierly handling. Was the Bimbashi a dog that he should burn his father by abusing a body? It is well known that followers of Islam have a kind courtesy for the dead. Let him permit her to handle her kin.

The officer saw no reason to refuse so small a favour. I felt the hands of the women grip me. Luckily they took hold of me with circumspection and got me on the floor safely. It was a struggle to keep rigid when horny hands felt about my wraps—the Bimbashi in search of small-arms—but I held out until, the coffin having drawn blank, the lid was hammered over me again.

The worst was over. After service would come release. "I am satisfied. We will but rest in thine house for a few hours and eat what we have with us, then go our ways, Kasha," the officer said.

I had scarce time to realise that this spelt some more hours in my cold, cramped prison when a man entered the edifice and bestowed greetings on the Chaldæans and the officer. "God's peace be with thee likewise,

Auraham," all the Christians replied, and, "Who art thou?" demanded the Bimbashi.

"Effen', it is my sister lieth dead here, for I am elder brother of the wife of the Rayis here. I work on a farm some miles away, and, my master being a hard man, hath yet given me until to-day's sunset that I may attend her to the grave. Therefore, let the burying begin as soon as morning prayers be done, Kasha Sergius, my father, I pray."

"Yea," said the Bimbashi. "I have never viewed the burying rites of the Chaldean folk, and will watch ye as my men rest."

Chapter XVII

“ HON-HA-A-A ! ”

THIS was a nice new factor in the situation ! Cold chills quite unconnected with the actual temperature began to run down my spine.

“ This haste is unseemly, brother,” said Marta, a quaver of terror in her tone. “ Evening will be early enough.”

“ Nay, let it be after the morning service, that this good man may rest ere he resume his way,” the well-meaning Bimbashi said.

“ There is no grave dug,” the Kasha put in.

“ There be men to dig,” rejoined the officer.

“ The Kurds have left us no spades,” the Rayis objected.

“ Use sharpened stakes,” the officer replied.

“ But the folk must fare abroad to gather acorns, that we may live and not die during the coming cold,” Deacon Ishu protested.

My friends were fighting gallantly. “ It will not take a whole village to bury one body,” the brother of the dead replied. “ I am my sister’s nearest kin and I say, Bury her after the service.”

“ I will not be ordered that thus I shall do, and thus I shall not do, in my own church, Auraham, son of Shlimoun,” growled the cleric.

“ I crave thy forgiveness, O Kasha Sergius, my father.

And in different wise crave thy kindness to do as I have said.”

“What hinders, then, over the burying?” the Bimbashi demanded in a tone of suspicion.

The priest was at his last ditch, and afraid of rousing full mistrust in the Turk’s mind. “Now that thou askest civilly it shall be as thou desirest, Auraham,” he said, despair in his voice.

Pleasant hearing for me in the coffin! His next words, spoken louder for my benefit, brought some comfort.

“We be honoured that the Bimbashi Effen’ will condescend to look upon our service,” he said. “Our burying rites be lengthy, however, and I fear the Effen’ will find himself unable to wait to the ending.”

I recollected that Chaldæan funeral services sometimes last four or five hours, and composed myself. Another spell of lying in state; and cold and danger was not a pleasant prospect, but of course they would not attempt to bury me alive, if only for fear of my giving the show away. The priest would find a way out before the time came.

The soldiers departed, the Nagushah roared again, and a stream of feet shuffled in, punctuated by little clinks—the congregation filing in and the men leaving their daggers in the porch. And then a moment’s tense hush, waking into the measured cadence of the matin praises of the first Christians of the East.

“In the way that we are going may Thy mercy keep us, O Lord, as it kept the child David from Saul.

“Give us Thy mercy as we are pressing on, that we may attain to peace according to Thy will. The grace that kept Moses in the sea . . . by that grace deliver us from evil.

“In the morning we all arise, we all worship the

Father. . . . We ask with sighing, we beseech Thy mercy. Every day I promise Thee that to-morrow I will repent; all my days are past and gone, my faults still remain. Have mercy upon me! Have mercy upon me ! ” . . .

So, to and fro, swayed the antiphon; the voices blent, the service was over, and the grotesque horror of my position was gone. The great fact stood out that these many scores of my fellow Christians sang praises with unusual heartiness that day because fear of Turkish persecution was over for the while, and the greater one that their future safety depended entirely on me.

The congregation trooped out again. Near the head of the coffin a child stumbled and whimpered, her mother comforted her in a caressing whisper—How, I thought, would that same child whimper under a Turkish bayonet? I would be buried alive sooner than learn, through my own doing, what that sound would be like !

A new quartette of watchers replaced my friends. They wailed at intervals; other times I was left to silence and my own reflections. Would the Turks go before the burying began, or before it ended? Obviously the Kasha's rôle was to put off the beginning as long as possible; then, if driven to it, to make it a tug of war between the Bimbashi's curiosity and ceremonial tediousness. And, in any case, could my friends get me out without letting the whole village into the secret? And what if the Bimbashi outstayed the service? The Kasha dare not let me be buried alive; but what if I gave no sign of vitality and he thought I had really died of cold or suffocation?

When my musing reached that point the Kasha's delays touched their limit; a pair of deacons, not my

friends, came to warn the watchers and prepare the church. Presently Ishu came, made a pretence of doing something to the coffin, and whispered: “Be still, wait, we have a scheme. Though the first sods fall, hope yet.”

I had to be content, though it occurred to me that it would be easy for them to hustle down the mould on me, trusting that my cries would be unheard—that was absurd enough. I began to lose nerve, and had to press my lower jaw to the coffin-lid to check a betraying chatter of my teeth.

Ishu stepped out, and soon afterwards sounded a noise of many feet a-tramp, with wailing high above it, and the Kasha’s voice cutting thinly through the diapason as he chanted extracts from the liturgy. The footsteps trooped in, silence fell, and he began the service in a shaking voice.

He spoke as slowly as possible, spinning out each prayer to its full deliberate length. By contrast the choir’s chanting of the responses in ordinary time sounded liltingly staccato. When he was speaking alone I could hear the Turks outside the doorway commenting on what was going on.

A stage of the service for outdoor use was gained, the coffin was lifted, carried a few feet, put down and pushed along the ground—through the door; carried again—the courtyard; pushed again—the wall door; swung up, borne swayingly down the steps at an angle which nearly set me on my feet, and then carried on the level at a jerky pace.

“No unseemly haste, my children !”

Thus the time-gaining Kasha, as he dealt out a few directions; all round horses came at full gallop and drew up near me. My heart stopped beating a moment as Papa’s voice rang out.

Scarcely pausing for the usual greetings, he asked

after me. He was Jerningham Agha, and his daughter had come over-night to Sliwa Klissia; where was she now?

The Rayis explained, the Khanoum truly came to the village, but, finding it harried and in no wise fit for her entertaining, rode on again, after having the road to Kochma described to her. And had she not reached the town? Wealth of God——!

“Lost!” cried poor Papa. It was hard to refrain from calling to cheer him up. “Ye let her go, then?”

I knew it was the presence of the coffin that kept him from saying candid things to the Rayis. The Bimbashi tramped on, after a murmured colloquy. “Y’Allah, thou dog of a Christian, wilt swear it is as thou sayest?” he demanded.

“By the Head and House of Mar Shimoun and the blessed Gospels, since last evening mine eyes have not lit on the Khanoum!” the Rayis asserted truthfully.

“Allah ’r Rahim! A Frankish lady alone in the wilds! I will give three of my men who know this part to aid you, Effendi, and, if my orders were not to proceed straight back to Bitfa after my mission here is done, would come likewise. Youssouf Mosuleani, Airat, Begtash son of Mourad, go with the Effendi, and so soon as the lady is found do ye return to Kochma. Effendi, Inshallah, you will find your daughter, soon and safe.”

They exchanged salutations, the hoof-beats died away as Papa and his followers set off afresh in search of me, and the process of interring me resumed its interrupted course.

Again my prison was slung up and the choir raised the inexpressibly eerie burial-chant. It was, as the chinks and air-holes showed, a grey day, a louring day with rain in it; a few drops began to patter down and

their rapping on the hollow wood mingled weirdly with the high-pitched, resonant, wailing tones.

“Hail my brethren and friends who sleep !” so cried half the choir, in character of the soul of the newly deceased. “Open the door that I may enter and see your ranks.”

And the other half trilled back as the dead in Sheol :

“Come, enter in, and see how many giants are sleeping here and have made rust and dust and worms in the bosom of Sheol ! Come, enter and see, O child of death, the race of Adam ; see and gaze where thy kind dwells ! Come, enter and see the abundance of the bones of their commingling. The bone of the King and the bone of the servant are not separated. Come, enter, and see the great corruption we are dwelling in.”

And sharp in answer rang out the triumphal conclusion from the people in full :

“Wait for the Lord, who will come and raise you by His right Hand !”

With this reassurance clanging out, my prison was set down by the open grave.

Another stage passed, the wind was cutting in at the chinks ; through them, also, the rain dripped and began to soak my wrappings. Things were growing desperate, only my education in a land of Fate and Allah kept me from panic. Would the priest succeed in spinning out the service until the Turks were bored ? If he did, how would he get me out then ? And was I likely to survive many more hours' exposure ? And

if he could not outwear the soldiers' patience—it was like the desert, the situation—La Siwa Hu. Only a stroke of Providence could set matters right, I decided, and as I did so Providence stepped in neatly with the rattle and snap of many rifles fired at long range.

Simultaneously with the clatter a bullet crashed in a corner of the coffin, missing me; a voice near cried out in pain and five-score in alarm; then there was the sound of people who fly in haste, and the voice of the Bimbashi calling his men to attention.

For a moment I thought the Turks had begun a wanton massacre, the echoes of a snarling “*Hon-ha! Hon-ha-a-a !*” sounded in the distance enlightened me. It came nearer and nearer, swelled clear and close in triumphant derision until there was a thudding of hoofs around me. Then the yell of triumph changed to one of wonder, pistols went off desultorily, a word of command in Turkish was snapped out, a score of rifles barked in disciplined unison, and then there was Domdaniel going on in the churchyard.

It was easy to understand. The Turks lounging in the shelter of the trees and tombs, had been unobserved by a party of Kurds riding the road above the village. The funeral party had caught the attention of my blood-brethren, however, and for pure kittenish fun they had emptied their rifles on the close-packed mass of folk, and then charged down the slope. Their surprise when the Nizam rose from ambush must have been excessive. The Kurd will never risk a brush with the military if he can avoid it. And, as before-mentioned, the unarmed people ran and hid, and all Domdaniel was let loose in the churchyard, and I was in the middle of it, under the boots and hoofs of it, in fact.

For a short, terrible space the battle raged, and every minute of it threatened to be my last, for men and horses stamped and fell on the coffin, and why it did

not burst is a mystery to this day. Providence, I presume. An eternity of firing, yelling, stampeding, and awful screams from wounded or battle-crazed horses seemed to go by. It was a few minutes in reality, then the tide of war receded and its noise grew fainter.

Blind panic came on me, and I would have tried to break my way out. The nails were loosened by two removals and replacements, but I was powerless to struggle, between cold, cramp, and the shroud. I felt Fear, blind unreasoning Fear—it was past La Siwa Hu.

Blessed voices showed at that point that two Chaldeans had returned from the flight. "Take the other end, Shamasha Ishu!" the Kasha ordered. "We will bear it to the cave lest the fight return hitherward."

This for possible hearers, and in a whisper: "Khanoum! You hear? Your release is here, thanks be to Allah!"

The coffin rocked and swayed as the two ecclesiastics bore it away, and the sounds of strife grew dim. The cave was a small one at the foot of the church hill, the mouth concealed by bushes. The coffin was set down with a jerk, the lid crackled as it was torn off in haste. A little light sifted in through the leafless bushes. "Pardon, Khanoum, it is in haste—if any one sees us——"

So the Kasha apologised. To explain the apology the coffin was tilted sideways and I was tipped out gently on my face, as one turns out a tinned rabbit. I did not trouble about dignity. I rolled on my back and lay in the joy of free space, watching while the men lifted another shrouded form from the back of the cave and put it in my late resting-place.

"The Khanoum will have pity and pardon again?" this second apology from the priest was to excuse his rollin ga cloak round me, and afterwards picking me up

and bearing me out of the gloom into the dull morning and lashing rain. Oh, the feel of the rain on my cheeks through the fold of the cloth he had arranged over my face! He carried me at a sharp run, the Deacon trotting alongside, and before the rain had soaked through the cloak we were in the wood and I was set down on a bank and the muffling cloth withdrawn.

“We and our families will bear you on our heads for ever!” the Kasha cried. As he spoke he went on his knees to kiss my hands. The Deacon went one better by grovelling to kiss my feet. “The Nizam have taken horse and driven the Kurds away. I saw them with mine eyes!” he chuckled. “They are afar off on the hill! And the Khanoum’s father is near. I will bring the mare.”

He raced off, Kasha Sergius proceeded to hack the wrappings off me with his khanjar—with an apology, brought me a drink of water from a spring—with an apology, and rubbed my hands and feet—more apologies, until I was able to move a little. As he rubbed he talked.

“Nay, Khanoum, I had no plan,” this in answer to a question. “No plan, only belief that God would send rescue in time.”

“But, Kasha, the Deacon told me thou hadst one.”

“By my bidding, Khanoum. We knew He would send the aid in time, but feared that a Feringhi would not have true faith, and so comforted you.”

Which was exactly what I might have expected from Orientals. “But you are half dead!” the good man added in pity. “I can bring you in one heart-beat a little wine from the nearest house—no, no fear of detection—the people have run to see the fight—and we have plenty; the accursed Kurds are too strict Shiahhs to defile themselves by smashing the jars.”

He wrapped his own cloak round me, dropped and kissed my feet and hands in turn. "Ya, Khanoum!" he exclaimed, kneeling with my hands still clutched in his and his fine eyes chaining mine, "I have loved sisters in the village—and now the Kurds will not dare to attack us for so long!"

He rose and ran in turn. I flexed my cramped limbs, drew the cloak around me, and looked round. I was sitting on a fallen trunk in a natural cosy corner wherein the village men and maids probably did their flirting when it was not early on a drippy morning with a fight going on at the other end of the place. At present it was unattractive. I withdrew my gaze from the sodden undergrowth and leaves on which my bare feet were cushioned to the ring of melancholy, close-grown trees round. They were dark; dark wood-depths backed them, and between two a man stood.

The shock shook the cold out of me. In a flash I was simultaneously conscious of my feet and hid them under my skirt, wished an earthquake would arrive, and wondered if Fate would ever find a more grotesque joke to play on me.

The man was staring at me, his mouth above his turned-up collar agape a little with sheer astonishment. It was the American.

I could not speak for a moment. I wondered if he had been there three minutes—in which case—well, he probably did not understand Syriac, and Kasha Sergius—I shuddered at the thought—was a full-bearded, full-blooded, handsome, muscular Christian, not a day over thirty.

"Miss Haroun—Miss Jerningham!" the man gasped.

"How did you come here?" I snapped fiercely.

"Left Bitfa for Diabekr two hours ago, heard shots and came to see the fight, lost servants in the excitement, and lost my way in the wood." His explanation

was jerked out nervously ; his face was a study. I dare not ask how long he had been there.

“ You seem to have got into trouble since you left Bitfa,” he went on. “ Can I help ? ”

“ You can find the centre of interest—the fight—half a mile away, in that direction,” I interrupted, pointing.

He reddened. “ Miss Ha—Jerningham, I do not like to leave you——”

“ Even at my own request ? ” I interrupted again. “ Then please go.”

“ To leave you unprotected——” he hesitated.

“ —would be a good deal better than to try and look after me,” I sneered, half frantic with rage and weariness. “ I am an Eastern woman, and I would rather attend to my own affairs myself. I am among my friends, though you may not be aware of the fact.”

He regarded me gravely. “ On the contrary, I rather suspected it,” he replied deliberately.

Then he raised his hat and departed.

Chapter XVIII

“VALE, KURDISTAN !”

IN a few minutes the Deacon and the Priest returned, and Arjamand was making free with my back hair, in her affectionate way. The keeper of the secret place had tended her well, the laming had been trivial, and, all things considered, she was in fine fettle. “But you cannot ride or walk barefoot, Khanoum,” the Deacon desponded.

There was sense in the remark. “We will lift you into the saddle,” the Kasha proposed, “then Shamasha Ishu can hold you on and lead the mare gently. When you overtake the searchers you can declare he met you a few minutes before. What think you, Khanoum ?”

“Very well, Kasha. Help me up.”

“Before you depart, one detail. We had to tell the keeper of the mare the secret. He will be dumb—will you tell your father, the Agha ?”

“I considered the question as I lay in the coffin. No. It is not well that he should know. Inquiry might arise, you shall understand he is a true Feringhi. The Feringhi tongue trips and blurts. Now, help me up, for I weary for my father and my sister.”

The priest lifted me up, and, with a last mutter of thanks and blessing, fled towards the village. I rode by balance—bare feet do not accord with stirrups on a chilly day—and made up the details of my tale. It

is not really right to lie to your father, but circumstances excuse anything.

I was tired, and indisposed to self-criticism. Very well satisfied with myself, I just clung to the saddle and dreamed dimly of clean rugs and a bath, found the drippy world lovely after my return from the grave, and woke, tingling with mad irritation at a recollection of the American.

Silently Deacon Ishu led the mare, propped me up when I threatened to droop off, and kept watch. We went through the thickest part of the wood, meeting nobody, and with the battle noises fading behind us, the trees were thinning and the little dome of the Kochma Musjid faintly visible on the horizon when we heard an unmistakable voice behind a hedge.

I rode round into a group including Papa, Miksi, and Hajji Izzett, and two soldiers. They were dismounted, investigating some trail. I slid off Arjamand straight into Papa's arms, and for some minutes could do nothing but cling to him. On his part he was too overcome for anything but broken words of affection.

The Hajji and the Miksi shed tears of joy outright, the soldiers bawled the glad news to gather in the other searchers. Deacon Ishu was lionised for finding me. “Thank God !” said Papa at last, “but—child !”

He held me off a little, and glared meaningly up and down my person. “Where's your coat ?—And bare-foot, as I'm alive !”

“Kurds,” I replied unblushingly.

“Allah 'l Muhaimin, Effen' !” cried one of the soldiers, and made pantomimic inquiry by inserting one finger in his mouth, and opening his eyes at me round it after withdrawal. It is a gesture understood throughout Kurdistan, and stands for the close-pared state in which Kurdish freebooters love to leave wayfarers.

“Not so bad, my brother !” I replied, with a blush.

“Did you inquire for me at Sliwa Klissia, Papa? Then you will know I left there last night to ride on to Kochma. I have wandered about all night, part of the time I spent in a cave, and this morning fell in with Kurds. They robbed me of my furs and boots before I could escape. That’s all. How is your knee now?”

“I can ride. Your furs and boots, child? How strange——”

“I don’t feel up to talking now,” I protested. “It’s not nice up to the ankles in wet grass——”

“By Jove—I am a fool,” he rejoined, conscience smitten. “Wandering all night—my poor little girl! We won’t have another word until you are rested.”

And it was wrapped in his fur coat and mounted before him on the huge chestnut he rode that I finally reached the little town, with the rest of the searchers in triumphant, shouting attendance.

Kochma is a dirty little place, and our quarters were in a dirty little house with carpets hung up instead of doors, and any number of draughts per room. I was not disposed to cavil at anything; the shouts of our escort brought the other servants and Evelyn out into the muddy courtyard, and it was hard to tell whether, of the whole company, Evelyn or Sulti or Semiramis was wildest with joy at my return. Papa slid me down to Sulti, she carried me in bodily to the blessed privacy of the room she had prepared for me, and as we went I saw the expression of Evelyn’s candid English eyes change to blank astonishment as she eyed my hair fixedly. The appalling blunder I had made dawned on me, and the impossibility of ever retrieving it was apparent when I found that Sulti’s inscrutable Eastern orbs were also engrossed by the same object.

The consternation of the pair at my general plight was inexpressible. Kindness kept them from questions for a while; but by the time I was comfortably en-

sconced amidst my own nice clean rugs I had put them in possession of the tale I had related to Papa. They looked at one another with saucer eyes.

“Those Kurds,” said Sulti.

“They were probably dressed in buckram,” murmured Evelyn in a pensive aside.

“It is strange; they took thy furs, but I perceive thine earrings are safe,” said Sulti.

“I hid them in my pockets after leaving the village, and replaced them after the robbing,” I declared.

“And thy hair——” speech failed her. Her eyes met mine and I read a tale in them.

“I amused myself by doing it up in the Chaldæan fashion,” I announced boldly.

“So tidily,” she remarked.

“I believe you think I’m lying, both of you,” I made answer severely.

Sulti looked piteous. “It is because I love thee so dearly, my Rathia Khatoun! And I have known thine eyes so long!”

“If my sister chooses to prevaricate it is not for us to question, Sulti,” Evelyn reproved stoutly. But she looked distressed too.

I pulled her down beside me. “That’s right, little girl! My Sulti, thou readest a lie in mine eyes, readest thou shame therein likewise?”

“Not so, my Rathia Khatoun. None will ever read shame in thine eyes, save they be dead eyes first.”

“There spoke Asaf! Now, Sulti, of what I have told part is true, and part lies. I have spoken. And, by the honour of my mother, nothing has happened that should cause shame or regret.”

“I must believe that,” assented Sulti.

“If you didn’t we would quarrel, you and I,” returned Evelyn bellicosely. “I’m quite satisfied. Only sad because your dear albino lock is gone, Rathia.”

Marta had snipped it off before consigning my nail scissors to the stream. "Arjamand probably made a snack of it," I returned.

"Wonderful horse, Arjamand!" Evelyn kissed the denuded spot. "Let us be thankful, Sulti, that at least Rathia does not insult our intelligence by expecting us to believe her tales."

"I only expect you both to back me when I tell the tales to the pater. Now let us change the subject. And Evelyn Khatoun hath told thee of our sojourn in Kalmaru, Sulti?"

"I did," said Evelyn. "She jumped when I mentioned it."

"At the thought of thee in a strange place," replied Sulti, with composure. "But the ladies of the house were kind to you, it appears."

"'Specially the Khanoum Effen'," said Evelyn.

"She is tender-hearted," remarked Sulti musingly. She was kneeling beside my linen trunk, and paused to eye me reflectively, looking, with her arms sunk in the white piles, like an elderly, bronzed Anadyomene rising from the sea-foam.

"Hey? You know her?" demanded Evelyn.

"From your report, Evelyn Khatoun. And she gave you both gifts at parting? It is well. Now, my Rathia Khatoun, I am angered with you."

"Angry, Sulti, my nurse?" The abruptness of the change of topic failed to surprise me in my astonishment at the declaration.

"Very angry. I served thy mother before thee, it is true, and was a woman grown when I bore thee in mine arms, a little babe, by night and day; but for all that am I too old to be of use? I am not, so I presume to think. Yet thou didst slip away in the dark."

"It was to save thee discomfort," I protested.

"Fine comfort! I set my daily doings by thee, and

without thee I am even as a bird without its tail. These three days I know not what to do; there is no Rathia Khatoun to dress and to prepare the little comforts for at the set times—I am bewildered. And the nights——! Thinkest thou I slept? The first and the next I know not where thou art; I see thee in the cold, the wet, the wind. They are eternities, those nights! May Mart Maryam keep me from the like again! The third night I learn thou art at Sliwa Klissia. What comfort is it? I pray thee answer. Thou in a dirty village! Ya, Mar Geework, I think, they know nothing of the ways of English ladies, who will look after thee! Mayhap the Kurds will go on chappaw and kill thee by mistake, or thou wilt sleep in a draught and have a cough—There!”

I did cough, opportunely. The lecture ended in something peculiarly nauseating from her private drug box. I had not lived with her for twenty-two years without learning her weak spots.

It was afternoon before I descended to the sole reception-room of our limited establishment. It was not an imposing apartment; the servants had omitted to remove the festoons of spider-web from the corners and to wash the floor before laying down our rugs—Saruk carpets on a dirty floor symbolises the way they do things in Asiatic Turkey. The furniture consisted of our trunks and saddles, a few divans, and a terrible oleograph of the Russian Imperial family left behind by the owners of the house when they were evicted for our accommodation; but Papa, established by the stove with Evelyn on his sound knee and his old black briar, made it Home.

Evelyn had been smoothing the way, still he received me a little grimly at first. “Well, Rathia,” he began, carefully ignoring my proffered cheek, “what have you to say about the dance you led us?”

Earlier in the day, when I was underdressed, and wet, and worn out, his righteous indignation at my escapades had been swamped in pity; now that I was rested and clothed and curled and scented, and myself again, it flared up. “Only that I am sorry I had to worry you, dad, dear,” I replied humbly; “and, after all, it was as well for Evie.”

“That’s what I have been trying to din into his head for a mortal hour!” Evelyn came nobly to my support with a stage aside. “Why, I’d be at Mouschat—in that Odah—but for you! Tell us fully about Sliwa Klissia now, old girl.”

The narrative satisfied him, with respect to plausibility, that is. He scolded me violently for leaving the village; then proposed that we should get the official inquiry over. We accordingly donned ulsters and tarboushes and sallied out into the drizzle.

By rights the Kaimakam should have called on us, but he had suggested that we should drop in at our convenience and save ourselves the trouble of an official visit. This sounded vaguely thoughtful on his part, but we found out, during a subsequent visit to his haremlik, that his one spouse was a terribly muscular Albanian lady who would have found fault with him for calling on a brace of veiless Christian damsels *sans chaperon*.

Therefore Miksi and Hajji Izzett conducted us to the gubernatorial office, the first-floor back of a jerry-built hovel, situated in the lowest, wettest part of the place. The ground-floor was devoted to stables exclusively. You went up a ladder and along a passage full of soldiers and hangers-on, then behind a curtain into a large room furnished with a divan, some bags full of documents, many cobwebs, a few rugs, and an *Almanac des Usages de Levant*. The Kaimakam, Gashko Bey, was slightly tipsy but very nice; a fat man, new to Kurdistan and

his post, fussy and nervous. He established me with Evelyn at the head of the divan, perched himself at the far end, tried to hide his feet behind the scabbard of his dress-sword, and kept his eyes on my shoes when he had to address me. He had never spoken to a European lady before, and probably feared that Papa would canvass his intentions if he looked too often at my unveiled features.

“As salamu 'alai-koum, Effendina ! As salamu 'alai-koum, Evelyn Effendina !” He saluted us, after Papa’s introduction, by raising a hand from his knee to his lips and brow. “Yaghmour chok !”

I agreed that it was raining, that one might, in fact, venture to call it a damp day. Papa prophesied that we would have more rain before we were done with it. Like human nature, conversational openings are fundamentally the same throughout the world. Then a young soldier brought in the customary tea and cigarettes, the Bey asked if we took lemon or tamarind, adding that he preferred lemon himself in weather like the present. He clung to the climate as a safe topic, and it brought him gracefully to business. Had I not found it trying to be deprived of my furs in the drizzle ? And would I permit him to summon the Chief of Police, who wished to learn the details of my mishap, with a view to the apprehension of the thieves ?

The Chief, a large, austere Lazé, was admitted, and with him a young Bagdhadi secretary, who sat on the floor and took my depositions on an enormous sheet of paper. I sketched my Bitfa adventures lightly, concluding : “Veli Yozbashi will have informed thee, Bey Effen’, of how I penetrated into Bitfa in search of information, and there got into difficulties.”

“All of that is known to us, Effen’. And the Frankish loupe-gatherer afforded thee a refuge until the-

Mutessariff held inquiry and had thee escorted out of the town. Is it not so?”

“Even so, Effen’.”

“But was the Frankish Agha at home? There is some talk that he is in Van on his business.”

“I was received by his deputy.”

“His deputy, Effen’?”

“At least by a Frank whom I took for his deputy in the *loupe* trade.”

“It was not known to us that the Agha had an assistant. His name, if you please, Effen’?”

I said, principally because I did not want to have Evelyn bothering me with questions about the American, that I had not asked about it. I supposed he was a Frenchman; he had been civil in affording a refuge, otherwise I could give no particulars of him. Then I went on with the real lies.

Some Eastern men are almost as sharp as women. The pair cross-examined me exhaustively; the Bimbashi had taken several prisoners at Sliwa Klissia, the Kaimakam wished to send for them to see if I could identify any of them. Naturally I did not wish to get innocent men into trouble. I declared I could not undertake to identify any of my assailants. During the robbing it was too dark to see well.

They could see to rob me. So the Chief of Police pointed out.

I replied: it was Wolf and Sheep Time, light enough for robbing purposes, but not enough to mark the features of a stranger.

Further catechised, I said I had been compelled to hand over my property without dismounting, and had made my escape by a bold dash while the Kurds disputed over the booty. After that the inquiries grew so searching that I began to feel myself getting involved and had to cut the affair short at any cost.

“A moment, by your grace, Bey Effen’,” I murmured, and, in a weak voice: “Papa, will you send Miksi to ask Sulti for some cologne? I find the strain of answering so many questions——”

It answered admirably. My excellent parent was up in arms at once. He hinted broadly that he thought the examination had lasted long enough. The officials pointed out that the maintenance of peace and order in the Kaza of Kochma required a full inquiry *re* my case. Then he grew excited and declared that the Kaza of Kochma and its law and order might go to Kaf before he would sit still and let his daughter be bullied. “Kaf” was his actual expression, but it sounded quite improper as he said it. They disputed warmly. I looked as pale and droopy as I could. Evelyn backed me admirably. She afterwards told me that her expression of silent indignation was a reminiscence of Ellen Terry in *The Cup*. Finally, when Papa threatened to wire to the Sultana Victoria and the Grand Vizier Gladstone, his personal friend, about the officials’ conduct, they collapsed and declared themselves satisfied with what they had already gleaned.

“I am sorry I could give thee no more information, Bey Effen’,” was my parting observation. “However, if you ever find a Kurd within the Kaza with his feet encased in a pair of Frankish-made lady’s brown riding-boots, size five, you can safely arrest him on suspicion.”

Next day it was: “Vale, Kurdistan!” and I said it without regret as we headed south for the Tigris plain.

BOOK III

IN THE LAND OF THE TWO GREAT RIVERS

Chapter I

WE REACH HOME

FROM one world to another in two weeks. From bitter Highland Autumn to sun-bathed Lowland Autumn. From a land of distress to a land where it is reasonably easy to be happy. In short, from Kurdistan to Mosul.

That was our journey. For form's sake a band of zaptiehs escorted us, but our real guards were the names of Shishman Jerningham Agha (which means "Fat Mr. Jerningham") and Mosuleani Khatoun. I am "My Lady of Mosul" commonly, between the rivers, more rarely "the Red Lady"—Kizil Khatoun. Our 'tween Rivers habit of nicknaming is a little confusing at times. We journeyed through valleys and over heights, every day there was more sunshine, and every day my spirits rose as additional miles lay between us and Kurdistan. It is not at all unpleasing to be wakened in the chilly, exhilarating, dusky dawn, before any Moslem can tell a white thread from a black and get him to his prayers, by the noise of the muleteers loading up and taking the separation from their warm blankets out of the beasts, verbally. It was the same tune each day:

"Ya, misery of thine immodest mother! May Allah make His face to turn from those who bred me to this work!"

"Rouse thee, laziest of all Al Khaliq made! May Allah make the countenance cold of him who sold thee to me!"

“Child of a female mule! May Allah burn the father of he who broke thee in!”

And so forth, *ad nauseam*. I wonder why Aristophanes never tried his hand at a Muleteers' Chorus.

Then our toilet in the dark would be enlivened by the sound of Papa's voice chiming in with good, decent, wholesome English abuse that dropped all the reedy profanity of the Orientals, as he got the servants off.

Sometimes we halted with old acquaintances, instead of fending for ourselves. We picked up good company by fits on the way. Now it was the Reverend Mr. —, of the Archbishop's Mission to the Chaldæans, who rode with us; an imposing figure with feet dangling to the knees of a mule, in a shabby cassock sandwiched between a turban and Cappadocian brogues. Then a big, mild, Dominican Father doing his pastoral rounds on a little, vicious donkey. For two days our route coincided with that of a Kurdish tribe moving to winter quarters, and we rode with the Chief at the head of a torrent of dainty-hooved brown sheep, mischievous goats, laden mules and cattle, fierce, hawk-faced men, handsome women, and sturdy children, for all the world like a minor Exodus. The Chief was a Sharif; that is, he had, like me, an Abbasside mother. Wherever he was became, automatically, a place of pilgrimage, and people came by night to ask him to draw pentacles on chips of wood for conveyance to sick folk to cure them withal. Descent from the Prophet's Uncle still conveys distinction in Kurdistan. We rested on Sundays, and always contrived to arrive on Saturdays at a Christian hamlet. There Church would be all ready for us, with Service and the Kiss of Peace, which latter scandalised Evelyn until she found that you simply touch the hand of the officiating priest, and the hands of any other worshippers who have preceded you, and then kiss your own.

The second Sunday we were in the Tigris plains. The fact became more apparent during each hour's sunny ride ; with rolling steppes around, arrowy Tigris generally in sight, and always sharp mounds ; the grave-piles of dead cities, rising and sinking on horizon and foreground as we rode on. The tribes, Kurd and Arab, were coming down from the summer pastures, the dells and hillocks were spotted with black-tent encampments, exactly like that Abraham Ben Therach must have pitched on his halts between Ur and Mamre. We could not halt near one, to greet an old friend or beg a drink of laban, but the news: "Shishman Jerningham Agha is back, he hath been made a Pasha by the Sultana Victoria, and Mosuleani Khatoun is back likewise with a mighty firman !" would run round the tents before we had dismounted.

Then would all the tribe tumble out, yelling as only Arabs and eagles can yell, the women sounding the maddening, flute-like Tahlil until one understood how, with a girl on camelback in front to craze them on, the Arabs once conquered half the world.

Most encampments boasted at least a few men who had worked for us before ; these all turned out to show their tezkares and beg employment. We promised to send for them if they were wanted, and at that the more energetic packed a supply of unleavened bread in their cloaks—after the way of the Beni-Israel when they fled Red Sea-wards—and joined themselves to our party, certain of being able to live somehow under our shadow. We headed quite a respectable cavalcade when we reached Tel Keif on a sun-bathed morning.

Tel Keif is the last stage as you come to Mosul from the north, and, as we had sent telegraphic notice of our coming ahead, most of our Mosul intimates had ridden there to escort us home, in the dear and pretty Eastern way. The Vali sent an escort of honour, which met us

before we reached the village, and we made an effective entry at the head of our shouting mob of Chaldæans and Arabs, with the grave Turkish soldiers at either side.

Piers headed the welcoming cavalcade, mounted on his showy, banner-tailed hajin, Mary Stuart. Elderly people tell me that Piers is a passable replica of Papa as he appeared when he first gladdened Turkey with his presence. From that I gather that Papa at twenty-five was a jolly little fellow with a hay-coloured moustache and sun-tanned features all habitually twisted inextricably in a prepossessing grin.

All the European women had turned out, together with many of the Chaldæan community, and Madame Henriot of the Louvre Expedition. They all enthused over Evelyn and gushed over me, and passed us round and kissed us until I felt like the Testament circulating round the jury-box. We did not mind it. The Persian, Chaldæan, and Arab men, and M. Henriot kissed Papa, and we hoped he did not mind it either. Then the village priest conveyed us to his house for lunch, and I sat between a Chaldæan Bishop and Mrs. Carleton of the British Consulate, and felt I was at home again.

"The Vali could not come," Mrs. Carleton apologised. "Dozens of other people, too. But of course, my dear, you cannot expect a large meeting-party if you come at the unhealthy season. Best grapes are five pounds a piastre," she added in the same breath. "And cucumbers a penny a dozen."

"Verily, Mas' Allah, it hath been a most blessed season for the fruit and grain, Rathia Khatoun," the Bishop added. Madame Henriot snatched the chance to inform me that it had also been a blessed season for Assyriology.

"For us, that is, *chère* Mademoiselle Jerningham,"

she supplemented. "Your poor cousin informs us he has had no luck—we are desolate for him!"

Madame Henriot was only a few years my senior, small, sallow, and fearfully clever. She was the Louvre Expedition, as she owned a natural aptitude, denied to her husband, for picking up epithets which Arabs do not like, wherewith to goad diggers into doing a winter morning's work in a summer noon. She proceeded to dilate on what they had netted for the Louvre that year, and to pity Piers, cattishly. It would have been exasperating if I had not had thoughts of my hidden trump ace—the Hittite spoil donated by the Khanoum Effen', to sustain me. The Louvre and Oxford Expeditions were in the same line of business precisely, and between them professional jealousy ran fierce and high. In private we exchanged *Punch* and *Figaro*, joined in getting up picnics, and nursed one another when it was necessary; but any one member of either party would have poisoned all the other expedition, with pleasure, over the ownership of a promising site. The unwritten law of Assyriology is that once an archæologist, properly licensed, has started work on a mound it becomes his freehold, and no rival may put a spade into it without his permission. The French had been ransacking an excellent mound that year, while the one we had left Piers to work had yielded nothing worth the packing.

I knew my hair bristled as I reminded myself that my foot was on my native heath again, that, like the skull whereof Sa'adi sings, by birth and breed—

"I was King of the Two Great Rivers, I was Babylonia's Lord."

In short, that I had all Assyria before me wherein to search for the wherewithal to blacken the face of the Louvre Expedition. And life is very desirable when

one has an enemy to work against and to humiliate in a friendly and Christian manner.

Early evening saw us on the way again in a fairy world carved out of amber and lying under a canary-coloured sky, lit by a throbbing, rayless, orange sun. We did no outrage to the poetry of the scene as we cantered along in a cloud of yellow dust, a picturesque cavalcade, prim, trim Europeans and gorgeous Oriental notables at the head, behind a dancing, gesticulating press of Arabs and Chaldæans on foot, or horseback, or camelback. By our road flowed arrowy Tigris, its golden banks reflected, golden, in its lapping depths, dark-hulled and golden-sailed boats, heaped with yellow grain or tawny limestone, floating slowly on its scintillating ripples, the scorched plains dimpling up and down around, all varied shades of gold and amber, and in front a huddle of hills, near and distant, peaking up yellow and violet in broken streaks.

A golden country. A country with a past of gold and a future that may yet be golden. Ah, my Land of the Two Great Rivers where all Life and Time began!

As we progressed I forged ahead with Piers and Evelyn, Piers trying to make Evelyn remember the landmarks as we passed them. Mrs. Carleton and the Bimbashi of our escort followed, the rest of the caravan was hidden by our tail-cloud of dust. In time two vast mounds detached themselves from the line of the distant hills, and stabbed up close before us. The one, steep-sided and flat of top, was Kouyunjik, famed Kouyunjik, the Shambles Mount where early explorers unearthed half the sacked and fire-scorched palaces of inhumed Nineveh. The other, Nebbi Younus, the Virgin Mound, distinguished by the dome above the tomb of the Prophet Jonah, which stands near the top, and, by making the pile holy ground, has kept it inviolate from pick and

spade ; yea, even when Rassam's oriental mind planned and Rassam's oriental tongue blarneyed for permission to ransack it ever so respectfully.

Then we went up a dip, and, lo, before us Tigris full of craft and on the opposite bank a fairy line of wall. And beyond the wall and reflected with it in the yellow water clustered trees and houses, and gilt-splashed Musjid domes, and leaning minarets a-plenty, and the gaping, black Water Gate, and the mixed black and green of the cucumber gardens established at the wall-foot in the mud left by the shrunken autumn river, and—in short, every well-loved, well-remembered detail of old Mosul.

We let the rest of the party take care of themselves ; giving Arjamand a word of Arabic, I led the other four down at a breakneck pace. A gallop, with thunder underfoot, over the creaking bridge of boats, a spattering exchange of words with the Wardens of the Gate, a rush through resounding, dark-arched bazaars and sunlit lanes to the accompaniment of greetings to Mosuleani Khatoun, a low gateway, and a big courtyard, cloistered and blazoned.

White walls, dark-arched gate, my own doves fluttering about—lightning flashes as they skimmed through sun from shade to shade—scraps of red evening sky shivering between the branches of the poplars and sycamores, the court floor a shifting network of broken shade and palpitating scraps of light. And the servants swarming round so eagerly that I could not step down from the mounting-block, but must needs stand elevated and introduce Evelyn to them, for all the world like a heathen priestess showing off her patron goddess. And Evelyn sat on her tall horse, and the elder folk cried, “The Khatoun Effen’ is come again !”

Khatoun Effen’ still meant the dear girl’s mother to them. They wept aloud as they kissed the dusty hem

of her skirt, and her boots, and she almost cried too, and laughed for pure joy, and stammered gracious words in her halting Turkish. The greybeard steward would have her step on his back instead of the block; I led her in, and—*Alhamdu'l'llah!*—we were home again!

Chapter II

A VIRGIN TEL—— ?

THE nicest thing about the East is the way you can go off for a few months or years and return to pick up life just where you left it off. We might have been away a night alone, as I told myself after I had gone over the house from roof to serdab. My Van cats and date-nightingales were making the place melodious in their degrees, the household corps was going about its duty like clockwork, mosque doves, beggars, and stray cats still made our court their common rendezvous and waited patiently for the crumbs from our table. Our Baghdadi head-cook's English had shed none of its evidences of acquirement in a café much frequented by sailors, and I had scarcely time to take off my hat before Sulti dragged Gauriel Junior before me, by the ear, on a charge of petty pilfering.

I only realised that we had been away half a year, and a crowded half-year at that, when the litter of puppies which we had left, tiny and blind, and feebly crawling in a basket, were brought to greet me, big and deep-voiced, by the proud mother.

Every one called. My women friends in troops: the Moslemahs anxious to see Evelyn and to know how the Padishah looked when I was presented to him; the Christians anxious to see Evelyn and to know if Langtry fringes were still the wear in Europe. Sheikhs of far-off hamlets called with accounts—invariably

apocryphal—of Assyrian ruins in their close vicinity. We were all kept busy, and Evelyn was worshipped. The Christians made parties in our honour, the stiffest Imaum had a greeting for Papa, and the day after our arrival our Moslem butcher killed a sheep in the road before our gate and gave the meat to the poor, in accordance with a vow he had made for our safe return.

Only the tremendous luck of the Louvre Expedition was the crumpled rose-leaf. How we could have held up our heads without the aid of the signets from Kalmaru I do not know. Hittite remains were not so popular or well understood in those days; still, Papa was overjoyed to send them at once to the Fund Committee in Oxford, after a few days' triumphal exhibition in Mosul. I was glad when they went. I could not set eyes on them without writhing inwardly at thought of my suspicions of the donor.

Now Piers had been conducting operations, as before-mentioned, in a mound which had yielded only disappointment so far. One morning, about a week after our arrival, the first passable find was unearthed: an inscribed mace-head of Esarhaddon. The mound was on the flank of Kouyunjik, a mounted Arab brought the news, we all rode out to see the treasure and where it was found, and, to celebrate the discovery, we gave the workers a day's extra pay and promised to send over sheep for a feast at night. In pure gratitude and affection our men, Arab and Chaldæan, flung down pick and spade and wasted some work-hours over escorting us home in state. They danced all the way, firing off their guns by spurts, and the townsfolk thought the Bedouin had taken the city, until they discerned us in the midst of the excited Beni-Ismail and distinguished the words of the impromptu chant to which they timed their gyrations.

"Allah Hu!" they sang, "We be the children of

Shishman Jernigan Pasha, and of Mosuleani Khatoun, and of Piers Blessington Agha ! Matches in his beard who contradicts us ! Allah Hu ! Shishman Jernigan is fat ; under his shadow we live ! Mosuleani Khatoun hath red hair ; it is a beacon whereto the wise and industrious flock ! The hair of the sister of Mosuleani Khatoun is golden ; it is as plentiful as the gold her father bestows on his men ! Allah Hu ! we be the wise, we be the industrious, the wise of the Two Rivers be we ! We will eat sheep, we will arise and uncover the Jinn images wrought by the Kafirun of old, even we will uncover them ! We will send them unto the land of the Franks, even unto Frankistan will we send them, that Sultana Victoria may say her Salat before them on the Nazarene praying-day ! ”

After executing a short set dance in the courtyard they swarmed back to work. We inspected the find in the drawing-room. “ The first museum piece this year,” said Piers, with the air of one who has dropped a medjidieh and picked up a beshlik, and is trying to find an uncovenanted mercy about it.

“ Museum piece, Piers ? ” said Evelyn, who had forgotten all she ever knew of business during her Western sojourn.

He hastened to enlighten her. He was always eager to give her information. Papa thought it was because, the dear boy being but an indifferent hand at Assyriology at the time, he was glad to find somebody he could inform. I had my suspicions, even at that early date. Now he explained that Museum Piece is a trade term for arms, statues, votive images, and the like, as distinguished from inscriptions. Inscribed tablets are what the Assyriologist is seriously concerned in finding ; from them scholars are now rebuilding the history, life, literature, and magic of the elder world. It is advisable to keep an eye lifting (such was his graceful

expression) for museum pieces, however. Unless you can read them, inscribed tablets are not inordinately exciting—to the exoteric eye they suggest badly shaped buns and shortbread; but any one can feel the romance of arms and sculptures three, four, or eight thousand years old. If you get together a neat little collection for exhibition in London the British public comes to gape, the newspapers print nice articles about you, people realise you are doing something tangible, and—subscribe to your Fund.

This is the sordid side of Assyriology, the divine science of grave-ransacking imperially. When Piers had got thus far Sheikh Salih was announced.

We continually keep a whole corps of scouts tracking 'tween rivers. Some of them are salaried, some honorary, and only to be rewarded by words and gifts of European trinkets. In the paid list are village headmen, lesser Arab Sheikhs, and other little great men of divers localities. In the unpaid are our personal friends and the Henriots' private enemies, military officers, a French monk who picks up much information on his pastoral rounds to Chaldæan Catholic villages, a picturesque Arab who has haunted the country for years, clad in rags and with a chain round his neck—said rags and chain being safe-conduct to him anywhere, as official sign of his mission to beg enough piastres to liquidate the fine for a manslaughter he had the misfortune to commit once upon a time—and big Sheikhs like Salih.

Salih is a Shammar, a son of the desert who finds it necessary to fill his nostrils with cotton-wool when he enters a town. As the height of compliment, he removes it when entering our house. He was now shown in, a stately, muscular, middle-sized man of thirty, stalking king-like in his flowing blue and khaki cloak. A silver-bordered, silver-tasselled kefiyeh strapped by a horse-

hair band round his forehead shaded eagle eyes, features thin to the bone, and the tint of bog-oak, and an orderly straggle of black elf-locks.

We gave him coffee and a pipe. Evelyn was introduced, and I made kind inquiries after his wife and children. The task of asking about the health of the lady would have been a difficult one if I had not taken the precaution of asking Piers beforehand for her name. Our Sheikh was rich as Arabs go, and he had a settled habit of getting married once a month, divorcing the spouse of the previous moon first; thus five wives had intervened between the present one and the one I had known when I last met the family. The business done, he remarked that he had come to cure his sight of a long-standing complaint by contemplation of our long-missed features. He had received information that he could do so from the virtuous Henriot Agha. He met the virtuous Henriot Agha in a little village between Tekrit and the Jebel Hamrin.

Here he stroked his beard and looked like an Arab who could an' he would. "I wonder what business carried M. Henriot to so far a spot?" said Papa, hintingly.

"Inshallah, the excellent Agha told me of his business," the Arab returned. "It was by Allah's will that he met me as he returned from inspecting a Tel at the south-western end of the Jebel, by name Tel Abou Khatoun."

"It's on the Chesney map," said Papa to me; "both Place and Rawlinson marked it as of no use."

"So likewise did the virtuous Henriot Agha express himself to me," said Salih. He understood English.

I suppose I started as perceptibly as Papa did. Salih proceeded: "It was three noons ago that we met. Having so spoken to me he set out for Mosul. Then did the headman of the village beg me to convey

a little gift to thee, O Jerningham Pasha. The name of the man is Mahmoud Ibn Younus, and he is indebted to thee, Jerningham Pasha, for thy services when he was in Mosul jail over a tax-matter. His village is named Khatounabad, and is the nearest inhabited spot to Tel Abou Khatoun, whence he procured the gift."

He craved permission to call his attendant; the attendant lugged in a large package, and when Piers had hacked off its sackcloth wrappings and revealed the headman's gift we were like people struck dumb—the two of us who understood. Papa tilted it about in the light and I traced the arrow-shaped characters on it, while Salih smiled indulgently and tried his English on Evelyn, and Piers looked over our shoulders in respectful silence.

"A door-socket!" said Papa at last, with sparkling eyes. "If one could only read Cuneiform like print! But I make out the name is Asshur Dan, son of Ninib Apil Ashara. At the south-western end of the Jebel Hamrin, Rathia!"

"I believe we are on the track of another Khorsabad!" I returned exultantly.

"May Allah send the prey!" said Salih, rising to go.

"We are in thy debt, and we will meet, Inshallah, at Khatounabad," said Papa, as we exchanged parting greetings.

"Another Khorsabad?" he repeated, when we were alone.

"M. Henriot——" said Piers dampingly.

"Mounds have been snatched as well as found," I retorted. "Remember Kalah Shergat. And Rassam lost Abou Habba for lack of a day's cheek. Let me see—Monsieur may have got here last night. Call Gauriel, Piers."

Gauriel, eldest hope of our Deacon, and my general factotum, came. "Take this piastre, child," I said;

“with it buy a melon for thyself, and if thou art desirous of sharing it, like a good, unselfish boy, with Henriot Khatoun’s foot-boy, thy bosom friend, why should I mind?”

He took the coin with an intelligent grin. His friendship with Madame’s footboy was a trade asset. Each youth was bribed by his mistress to pump the other regularly. And each knew the other’s orders, and knew he knew he knew them too. “Be back within half an hour and bring his soul with thee. If thou permittest him to foist any lies on thee we will detect them later, and Piers Effendi shall whip thee,” Papa added.

Papa and Piers can never eradicate their ingrained Caucasian candour. It takes a touch of oriental blood to enable you to instruct a spy to go spying gracefully. Gauriel looked distressed at this European crudeness, murmured, “To lie is the salt of a man, but only a fool believes,” and departed. We filled in time by locating the Tel on the map.

“About five miles from the river,” said Papa. “I vote we raft below the junction of the Zab Asfal, then cut across country.”

I assented. “The Tel is in a desert part. We must take a large number of workers, also provisions. If we ride it will take too long to cross the two Zabs. Eh, Gauriel, thou art dilatory.”

“Ya Khatoun, it take me such a long time to eat that melon-fruit all by myself. You get such a big melon-fruit for a piastre——”

“By thyself, child?”

“Ya Khatoun, how can I share it with my friend when he is gone with his Khatoun? To-day they set out-started down the river. Henriot Agha, Henriot Khatoun, and an overseer on a raft, and three gangs of workers following along the bank, Khatoun.”

“Lost!” sighed Papa:

“If Madame had done the scouting she would have had sense enough to hire a few natives to scratch about the Tel under her command while she sent for proper diggers,” I returned. “It appears M. Henriot had not sense enough to do so, or Salih would have heard of it.”

“They started first,” croaked Piers.

“What does that matter?” I retorted, jumping up. The glow of battle tingled through me and lifted the short curls on my temples. “We’ll cut them out!”

“We cannot race them openly, my dear,” Papa objected.

“We are not going to,” I returned. “We’ll keep out of sight behind them, with a mounted spy ahead to warn us if we seem in danger of overhauling them. When they land we will land too, and cut round to the Tel by a different way. You must send at once to Kouyunjik for Hajji Izzett; he knows that district and will do for safe-conduct as well. A virgin Tel? It’s too strange for fiction, it must be true.”

Chapter III

THE RACE BEGINS

WE scattered to the four quarters of Mosul in haste. Gauriel the Young flew post to the mound hard by Kouyunjik to summon his father, Hajji Izzett, and a company of trusted workers. Papa went to the Konak to beg an escort. The steward ordered provisions for delivery at the landing-stage. Sulti packed. Evelyn and I accompanied Piers to the river, and stood on the bank looking on while he bargained fiercely on the pebble beach with a gang of kelekjis for a large kelek which they had just finished.

The kelek, or Tigris raft, is a simple affair: a platform of poles and bamboos buoyed on inflated sheepskins. For passenger use little cabins are built on it, and it will bear you safely down-stream so long as you do not run into the bank, or scrape over a sunken rock and burst the skins. It is identical with the craft that conveyed the stones and sculptures to the palaces of Nineveh and Asshur when they were a-building, thirty centuries ago. You can see them represented on the Khorsabad and Kouyunjik bas-reliefs, and the modern kelekji inflates the skins in the primitive, lung-power way also portrayed in the same works of art: though, of late, a few enterprising workers have discovered the utility of the bicycle-pump.

It took Piers a long time to come to terms. Before he was done all the waterside workers and loafers had

drifted round in a dense ring, alternately bawling encouragement to him and to the rafters. Piers is too gentle and mealy-mouthed for the East; it was tiring to watch him capering about in the sun, vociferating the best abuse he could bring himself to use.

"By the bye, Rathia, have you heard that the Henriots went down-river this morning?" asked our Consul, who had come with us.

"Yes, Godfather, very sudden, wasn't it? I wonder where they were bound?"

He suppressed a grin. "Kim belir? They were in too great a hurry to tell any one. Seems odd. And, I say, it will look odd if you trot off without telling me where you are bound. Somebody might come inquiring, you know."

I considered. "Ya my brothers the kelekjis!" howled Piers. "Your mothers mocked at morals and your fathers were all fools. And between them ye are mules, and I will not give more than four piastres a head per day!"

This showed he was warming up, and the bargain near its end. With my riding-cane I wrote, "Tel Abou Khatoun, near Tekrit," in the air. "If any one, say the French Consular Agent, makes inquiry, you can tell him we have gone to try a mound, but you did not hear the name mentioned by any of us. If he hints that we are trying to cut out the Henriots, remind him they never said where they were bound."

He chuckled approval: "All right, girls!" Piers sang out as he ascended the bank, while the crowd melted away noisily: "I've bought the kelek, and it will be ready by Sunset Prayer. You and the Uncle and the Firman can hop off this evening. I'll follow with the men on another craft the fellows are going to knock together. How about horses, Rathia?"

"I've arranged with Mr. Carleton, Pete. He'll let

us have Alpha, Omega, and Gamma. Hajji Izzett and two grooms will be in charge, with a baggage mule and Arjamand and Sakb led. They will send back warning if we overhaul the French too closely, Evie."

"I see. I used to think Assyriology was a simple matter. Now I find it's a Fine Art, a Craft, and own brother to Diplomacy."

"And a Sport for Kings," I concluded. "You'll do yet."

The first kelek party included Papa, Evelyn, and myself, Sulti and young Gauriel, a cook, and the rafters. We made an imposing procession as we rode down, after the noon heat, to the island in the middle of the river where the masonry part of the bridge ends and the continuation, of barges connected by planks, begins. Because our going was sudden, not more than the half of Mosul came to see us off. The kelek was laden with tents and gear, provisions, including some clutches of fowls who made a dolorous racket over their durance vile—tied by the legs in pairs without regard to individual affinities—and our private traps. Two canvas cabins had been constructed for us; an awning served for the men.

The customary delays incidental to a start in the Orient duly cropped up. Papa had gone up the beach to see the other kelek, and came racing up at the last moment. Arjamand and Mary Stuart had a difference of opinion, and in the course of it my Banou Begum bit the Queen of Scots in the neck and dragged her into a cucumber plat, to the ruin of the crop. The owner blamed us and wanted to hale us before the Kadi until we compensated him. The kelekjis indulged in an eleventh-hour strike for higher pay. Two boxes of eggs and my dressing-case were found stranded on the landing-stage, and slid on board as we cast off, with disastrous results. At last we glided into the current,

out of hearing of the parting shouts of our friends on the bridge and island.

The race had begun. And Allah knew what the prize was to be, sore disappointment, or, mayhap, a rival to Telloh and Khorsabad.

Our autumn evening in the Land of the Two Great Rivers was like a summer afternoon in the West. The roofs, domes, minarets, and trees of Mosul cut, sharp outlined, against the even, greenish sky; the plains, dotted with black tents, melted into golden haze on the horizon, a tender breeze from the far-off Kurdish hills stirred our hair and fanned our heated cheeks. Soon we were in full current; Mosul slid out of sight behind us. Few other craft were abroad; the banks were deserted, save where here and there an irrigation machine, bullock or donkey driven, peaked up, gallows-like, at the water's edge. We had the stream to ourselves in a silence only broken by the splash of the kelekjis' poles and the river's lilting undertone as it flowed with us, splintered into a million glancing, opalescent ripples.

The bustle of starting over, I disposed myself on a heap of cushions. Evelyn tethered Semiramis by a long lead, and then sat near the edge to see that the little wretch did not hang herself in the Tigris. Papa settled on a pile of baggage and brought out his briar, Sulti camped discreetly in the background, to keep an eye on Gauriel and the stores.

"Piers is bringing some one with him," announced Papa suddenly.

"Chefket Bey, eh?" I suggested.

Chefket Bey was a somewhat decrepit old Colonel of Nizam who had a chronic commission to keep an eye on us when we went digging, lest we should be tempted to pocket any Kirabu or tombs that belonged by rights to the Stamboul Museum.

"He's coming," rejoined Papa, "but I'm referring to a visitor, a young fellow Piers knew at Oxford. He was travelling down from Tel Keif, stopped to look at the kelek building, recognised Piers, and was introduced. It appears he has a letter of introduction or two for me; I had to invite him to come. I ventured to say you would be pleased, Rathia."

"Of course I don't mind. Piers's friends are always nice. What is his name?"

"You have me there, my dear. You know my memory for names."

The dear man can memorise pages of Kassite, Sumerian, and Hittite dynasty-lists after one reading, but is foggy respecting modern names until they have been well dinned into his mind. "I think it was Henry Williams," he proceeded. "No—Harry Williams—or William Harries."

"Never mind," said I. "What's in a name? Only a selection from twenty-six letters. Tel Abou Khatoun's the only name for us at present."

So we talked Shop; the bygone glories of Asshur and Kalah and high-walled Babylon, and the older cities behind them in time. We told, because it suited the hour and place, sad stories of the deaths of towns, how invaders swarmed through their streets and palaces, and the wantonly spread fire sucked and bilowed to the stars, the very stars above us now, and—

"The great walls clashed together, and all mean and lowly things
The death by fire confounded with the tokens of its kings"—

until we, the magicians whom men term Assyriologists, lay them bare to the sun again, and read from them romances more wonderful in their truth than any fairy-tale, and grander than all the made-up epics of the world.

Day died. The flash-like Eastern twilight died. We moored until the moon swept out at full futo the unclouded sky, then forged on again; the kelek swaying, with undulating, lazy dips of stern or bows, in mid-channel, or sliding with a subdued wriggling rush down the long, gently-sloping Tigris cataracts.

Rapid, even motion down a stream of steel, pearl-flecked and cutting through a land all vivid black and white in the moonlight. A cool, following breeze, banks gliding back to meet it; sharp-cut, black, or moon-silvered as they were high or low, a breathless, airy silence around; over all a sky of dull blue velvet blazoned with great, flickering stars. There may be, short of Paradise, some more ethereal pleasure than a raft voyage down the Tigris, but I doubt it.

The hush was scarcely affected by the sound of the poles, dipping rhythmically to the tune of a chanty sung in a whisper, a chant which the sailors of Sen-nacherib probably sang, the same note for note as, his galleys, of Karian pirate build, dropped down that same stream to the beleaguering of Babylon six-and-twenty centuries before. There was nothing to jar, either, in the subdued laughter that drifted down-breeze as the men shared out the stock of a tobacco-pedlar which we had bought for them on the bridge; the shore noises; the rustle of an occasional palm, the less frequent whinny of a desert horse, now and then a jackal's sharp, crackling bark, only intensified the hush. When the banks were low we could see the wastes stretching to the invisible meeting-line of earth and sky; a lone irrigation machine, quiet for the night, stuck up infrequently; at whiles the aromatic, melancholy scent of burnt and crushed wormwood was blown to us in intangible puffs of wind.

Night was big and mysterious, and we were little and just as mysterious to ourselves. Evelyn, much

impressed, crept near to me to hold my hand and feel some one alive to her grasp in the vast breathy emptiness. Semiramis, even, ceased to be a tiresome little animal, and became Little Sister Dog, sister to sweet Saint Francis of Assisi and to me, when she rested a woolly little head on my arm.

Anon the dewfall drove us to our cabins, and, to exemplify how the Prosaic sits ever at the gate of Poesy, the temperature fell below freezing-point during the night, and Sulti arose three several times to pile additional rugs on us and murmur libels on the female progenitors of the Clerk of the Weather, and the dew soaked through everything short of macintosh blankets.

"Allah made the heat and the cold, the rain and the drought," was Sulti's final summary; "but, verily, Eblis's self made weather."

Chapter IV

AN UNHAPPY MEETING

WE stuck on a sandbank during the night, and so lost several hours. A glistening sun-and-breeze-freshened morning found us running finely, with the cone of Nimroud; where lie embedded all the orts of the buildings of Shalmanesar and Asshur-nazir-Pal which our former excavators have not sent to the museums of Europe, rising into view in the ground-mist ahead. The banks were more alive now in spots, sounds of active country life drifted from the black tents on the plains, irrigation machines groaned and squeaked complainingly, in distance cattle lowed. Women came, pitcher on head, to the river-brink, and men to water the horses; a half at least had a yell or a gesture of recognition for Shishman Jerningham's portly, linen-clad form and Mosuleani Khatoun's red hair. By early breakfast-time we had reached the lonely stretch of river just before you gain Nimroud, running between banks bright with a belt of mustard plants along the moist margin of the tide and topped by a dismal festooning of dry, burnt, tangled skeletons of pansy and convolvulus.

Papa fretted abominably about the sandbank delay. I think it is not short of impious to think you can affect the scrawling of the Moving Finger by worrying. Evelyn showed a tendency to follow his bad example, and was peevish when I made myself comfortable on the cushions.

"My dear, I think I was the most energetic of the tribe when energy was wanted," I remonstrated. "When we sight our Tel I'll tire you out; meantime I will conserve my strength and enjoy life on my back until work-time comes round. And you'll do the same if you will be guided by me; it will do you good and will be so much nicer for me."

And I got out my Tennyson and tried to induce Papa to leave his Chesney charts and listen while I read the never-to-be-hackneyed stanzas:

"When the breeze of a joyful dawn blew free
In the silken sail of infancy,
The tide of time flow'd back for me,
The forward-flowing tide of time;
And many a sheeny summer-morn,
Adown the Tigris I was borne,
For it was in the golden prime
Of good Haroun Alraschid. . . ."

At that point the morning calm was split by an appalling detonation ahead, followed by a series of lesser ones. Papa abandoned Chesney surveys, Evelyn looked puzzled, Semiramis went to the front and barked at the noise, the rafters looked sympathetic, Gauriel and Sulti joined me in a gleeful laugh.

"Bank her, my brothers!" I called to the kelekjis "Papa, I will give you six to one in half-dozens of riding gauntlets that the Frogs have tried to pass El Awayi without unloading."

"I never bet, as you know, my dear, and I agree with you too," he replied.

El Awayi—*anglice* The Roarer—is a broken wall of iron-clamped stones, the remains of an Assyrian dam, across the river-bed. In spring rafts can pass over it all standing; in autumn and winter, when the stream is low, they should be lightened and at that half the skins are usually spoilt. We could not see down the

river, as it made an abrupt turn there, but we had scarcely gained the bank when the well-known form of Gamma cantered up with Hajji Izzett standing in the stirrups and gesticulating in wild delight. The French had attempted to shoot the obstruction fully laden, their raft was a wreck, the skins all ripped up, and the remains beached on a sand-bank. They could not proceed any farther by water.

"You have lost those gloves, Papa!" I cried, exulting.

"I have told you I never bet, child——"

"Oh Papa, denying your debts of honour! What an example for Evie! I will save you from yourself by ordering them at Mosul and having the bill sent to you. Now I suppose we must lie low for a while; the turn of the river and this tamarisk and camel-thorn thicket will hide us effectually."

The Cook's disciple was despatched with orders to feign himself a youth who had never heard the name of Shishman Jerningham and to sympathise with the Henriots' kelekjis. We had almost finished unloading for the passage of El Awayi when he skipped back with information that the French had sent to the nearest villages and Abu Hammad encampments for horses.

"To the Hamrins by land—they cannot possibly outrace us!" cried Papa. "The Tel is as good as ours!"

"Inshallah!" I agreed. "I would love to slip round and see how Monsieur's dear little waxed moustache and Madame's back hair look after the ducking, but it is too hot and too risky."

"And one cannot have everything in this world," Evelyn consoled. And we turned into our tent, which had been pitched in the shade of the thicket, and took life easily until late afternoon brought our spy back with news that the French had started. We were not foolish enough to spoil all by haste, we waited until

fresh news came that the French kelekjis had taken the wreck to pieces and had started for the Abou Hammad camp with the skins to wait day for conveying them safely to Mosul again. We then roused up, got the lightened kelek over the dam with but a slender casualty list in the matter of skins, moored, jeeringly, for re-loading below the sand-bank where the last of the wreck lay, and in a couple of hours were *en route* again.

We crossed the mouth of the Great Zab that evening, and after that we journeyed for two more nights and one full day. Two chill, sougning, starlit nights and one sunny, wormwood-scented day, and it was like one's idea of Paradise to lie on the cushions from dawn to dewfall under a flapping awning listening to the soft-lapping tide and crisply plashing oars, watching the banks and shoals glide past and the flocks of duck and cormorants with which they were alive rise in hazy clouds at our passing, and feeling the large-minded peace of the East permeating everything as we gained a lonelier and a lonelier land each hour.

The restful flat banks and shoals impeded us at whiles, and my loafing was punctuated by jars when we happened to run aground. At first Evelyn was a nuisance through her ingrained Caucasian fidgetiness. She pottered about with Papa's gun and spoilt the peace and restfulness until she had bagged a brace of duck which were afterwards served at dinner and donated to the boatmen out of regard for our teeth. It took her a good while and many cartridges to make her modest bag; afterwards she was content to take half the cushions and let me read poetry to her while she took care of a kicked shoulder and arm. As we progressed at first little boys from waterside villages swam out, astride of inflated skins, and had entertaining mishaps as they played about our craft like dolphins and tried to catch the piastres we threw them; once also, coming

round a bend at good speed, we crashed into a caravan which was fording at the other side of the elbow, spilt camels and drivers and loads all about the racing shallows, and went on holding our European ears and apologising in our best Arabic from the stern. In time, however, villages grew fewer and fewer, by the second night we were flanked by desert downland with no more than a cluster of black tents here and there.

Truly "Apart from Space, withholding Time" is the desert Between the Rivers. As it was in good Al-Raschid's prime it is now, and so will it be for ever, let us hope, an oasis of slow-going, Kismet-ridden shiftlessness in a world which now moves too fast for peace and poetry

Late on the second morning we trained our binoculars on Kalah Shergat and told ourselves we would try it—to-morrow, Inshallah! Very early on the third we were wakened by a shock that flung all the moveables in the cabin on top of us. "We are on a sandbank, my Rathia Khatoun," Sulti announced as she picked the baggage off us. "Something bad will happen to-day, it is very unlucky to begin the day with a mishap."

And we compared contusions, and felt inclined to agree with her until we were dressed and stepped into the dawn-freshness.

We were in a country, now, of desolate brown-burnt bluffs and hummocky downs ending in a sudden line of hills, mist-footed and dark-topped against the sunrise. And the morning was young and all a-tingle with the autumn freshness, which is sweeter than the spring, and Assyriology and the Tel big with possibilities cried to me, and life and youth stirred Evelyn, and the world was very good.

"Somethin' bad will happen to-day, Khatoun,"

wailed Gauriel. "The Cook's-disciple-boy was killin' a fowl-bird when the jar came and the fowl-bird got away and pecked *me*."

I focused the glasses on the hills. "The Jebel Hamrin, Evie. Hajji Izzett, Salamu 'alai-koum, what is yonder pile, like unto a two-pronged hill, between us and the Jebel?"

"The Peace of Allah be with you also, Khatoun. That is Tel Abou Khatoun, even the Mound of the Father of the Lady," the Hajji returned. He was now present, the horse-party had dropped out of sight the day before through the necessity of setting their pace by a slight temporary lameness of Alpha and had now overtaken us.

Evelyn clapped her hands rapturously. "At last!" she cried. Between us and the Tel was a line of jungle fringing the river-bank, beyond that a nine or ten mile stretch of broken ground, downs, scrub, and patches of small trees. A delightful prospect on a morning young, cool, rosy, and with elixir of energy in every lungful of its thin, acid air. I could have run to the Tel in my boots, Arjamand kicked her groom into the stream with a gracious air and marched down the mud-bank to screw her nose into my collar and tell me, in an epigrammatic whinny, that she was dying for a good steeple-chasing gallop. Papa was in high spirits also. "We are only a little north of the spot at which Izzett would have stopped," he observed, as we strolled about arm-in-arm while he smoked his matutinal cigar. "I doubt if the French can be near the Zab Asfal yet; not knowing we are on the track, they will not hurry. What is it, Hajji?"

The Hajji had come to introduce a Turk wrapped in his own cloak. The Turk was a zaptieh. He was one of four returning to Mosul from escort duty to Samarah; they had fallen in with some Hammawand Kurds first

thing that morning, had been spared their lives, had heard with joy the noises of our landing, and had sent a representative to crave of our grace the loan of a necessary garment apiece. This made Papa and our own zaptiehs look serious. I was certain, however, that the Hammawand never would think of coming so far west.

"The four zaptiehs were probably cruelly beaten by a single footpad, like somebody in Shakespeare," I concluded.

But the four, being garbed and introduced, stuck to their tale, and our defenders decided that we must proceed with the greatest caution and all together to the Tel.

It was rather a damper. "The fowl-bird pecked me, that Arjamand horse-mare kicked me, and I have broken two bottles of the Bass beer-drink!" sighed Gauriel to himself, as he set forth our breakfast in an open tent. "This is an unlucky day. Ya, Khatoun, I do believe the French have got another kelek!"

He pointed up-river. A large raft shot round a bend, in front two white-clad Europeans stood, behind them two-score Arabs in a state of frantic excitement made the hushed river suddenly vocal with the Jebour war-cry. Numerous poles and paddles were urging it on at such a speed that it could not be checked as it darted round the curve. Catching our stranded raft with its port forward corner, it swung round and was beached high on the mud.

With the shock the Arabs collapsed in a huddle, the two leaders saved themselves by a jump on shore and advanced to us raising their topis.

Piers was the foremost. The other was Harvey Wilbur.

Chapter V

FATE

FOR a moment the sun left the sky and the tang went from the morning air. I tried to disbelieve my eyes, but my ears corroborated their evidence but too surely.

"Hullo, Rath!" said Piers, cheerfully loud. "You don't look up to the mark. Is it from sorrow at not beholding your pet, Chefket? He's laid up; nothing serious. A *locum tenens* will be to hand later on; meanwhile let me introduce my friend Wilbur, Harvey Wilbur of Yenghi Dunia. Wilbur, my cousin, Miss Jerningham."

The American's air was composed. Only his smile was a little set, and his face was violently red under its coating of sunburn. I gave him a frigid bow, tendered the tips of my fingers, and withdrew my hand before he could touch it. Piers noted nothing amiss; he was absorbed in greeting Evelyn. She had just run up, and Papa followed.

"Delighted to see you looking so fit, Mr.—eh—Harries," said Papa.

"Wilbur, sir," laughed Piers. "Rathia, you introduce Evelyn, there's a good girl, while I tell the uncle the news. The Frogs forded the Zab Asfal yesterday morning, Uncle."

"Hey?"

"Fact, sir. We had it from a katerji whom we ran across, literally, at some shallows round a bend. We

gave him fair words and tuppence-ha'penny, and got all the news in exchange. 'They will, with bad luck to us, reach the Tel this afternoon.'

"Let them," replied Papa grimly. "We'll reach it soon after breakfast."

"A visitor is a welcome variant in our somewhat lonely life," said Papa pleasantly, when we took our seats in the tent. An unusual silence had fallen. Piers was attending severely to cucumbers and chicken, Evelyn was stuffing Semiramis as a preliminary to less serious business. I was waiting for the new arrival to give a lead, and the new arrival was dumb. "Most welcome, eh, Rathia?" Papa added with emphasis.

I looked over the American's head, and agreed that it was very agreeable to see a visitor from the West——

"Wilbur is from the north," said Piers.

"From the north?" I repeated. Actually it had not occurred to me until that moment that a most awkward complication was involved by the present meeting. Thoughts of the Rue de Pera and the wood of Sliwa Klissia had actually caused me to forget my insufficient explanation of the Bitfa affair. My mind worked rapidly. Of course the American had done the worst possible thing; it was evident he had suppressed all mention of it, otherwise Piers would have been babbling hard over the tasty bit of information. All this went through my brain in the moment it took me to look up at him. I caught his eye and in the glance a glorious piece of comfort was granted to me. In his eyes I read that he realised he had made an unmitigated blunder, and knew that I alone could retrieve it.

"You have come down from the north recently, have you not, Miss Jerningham?" he said tentatively.

"Yes," replied I. "And I know why you asked, Mr. Wilbur. I am—how shall I put it?—the distressed lady to whom you afforded sanctuary at Bitfa."

The other three left off doing whatever they were doing to sit up and look at me with round eyes. "Yes," I proceeded, "I had a vague impression, directly you landed, that we had met before, Mr. Wilbur."

"I had the same idea respecting you, Miss Jerningham," he replied. "The only difference is that I was sure."

"Papa," I explained, "you'll remember that, owing to a row over which I had not too much control, I was detected for a Christian and compelled to take refuge for a short time in the house of the old Gascon gentleman at Bitfa. I also mentioned, I believe, that the owner was out and had left one of his friends in charge. Mr. Wilbur was the person in question."

"How deuced odd!" said Papa. "You never mentioned Mr. Wilbur, Rathia, and he had letters of introduction——"

"But we were not introduced to one another——" I began.

"Well, Rath, you are a remarkable person if you need introductions when you are in danger of being massacred," said Piers. Evelyn was ominously silent.

"Miss Jerningham means, Blessington, that we were too busy to bother about names," Mr. Wilbur said. "I only learnt her surname through hearing her give it to the Mutessariff just before we went our several ways, and I had no reason for connecting it with Professor Jerningham at the time."

Piers and Papa looked equally bewildered. I dare not say anything more for fear of protesting too much. The American was in a similar case. Even changing the subject at that point would have looked odd. Unexpected relief came.

"If you ask my opinion," said Evelyn judicially, "I think Rathia is a well-plucked 'un."

"My dear child!" Papa remonstrated

"Respectable language is not equal to it," she replied. "If I'd gone through that Bitfa affair I'm sure I would have been too frightened to notice whether my rescuer was a white man or a black woman."

"Oh, Evie!" I protested.

"Well, I am picking up a little taste for hyperbole, perhaps," she conceded. "To put it quietly, I'm sure I should not have kept sufficient command of myself to remember what Mr. Wilbur looked like and recognise him long after."

"I don't think you do yourself justice," said I. "I am sure you would have rather enjoyed the experience."

"Well"—she could not restrain a delightful little smirk—"at least it would have been something for my diary."

"Do you keep a diary?" asked Piers, with interest. And, most happily, the conversation was diverted to a new channel.

We soon finished breakfast, and plunged into the invariable accompaniment of haste in the Orient—a strike. The men ran to and fro and swarmed distractedly about Papa. "Ya, Shishman Jerningham Agha! Ya, our father! We are your children, and you are our father and our mother!" they wailed. "We will follow you to Kaf and Kaf, we will follow you to An Nar—but we do not desire to follow you to Tel Abou Khatoun! Spare us, spare us, Ya Amm Jamal! We will perish there; it is a lonely spot—La Siwa Hu—nothing in Allah's world is worse than loneliness! And it hath been told in our ears that in the Flower Scason of Kubleh's tenth year some Hammawands were spied there—Hammawand robbers are worse than loneliness! Spare us, in Name of Allah, or at least give us a piastre a day more pay!"

Papa refused, spite of the robbers who had been seen thereabouts in the spring of 1846 A.D. Piers ran to help

him harden his face to the pleading, and Evelyn followed to hear and enjoy. Mr. Wilbur came to me as I stood by the river brink a little apart.

"I had an introduction to your father," he said steadily. "I am sorry to inflict my presence on you, Miss Jerningham——"

"Oh, we often have unexpected guests," I declared politely.

"It's very nice of you to temper the wind to the shorn lamb, Miss Haroun——"

"My surname is Jerningham," I interrupted.

"'Beg pardon. Miss Haroun slipped out; it seems to fit you, and is the name by which I have thought of you——"

"Well, you haven't known me long enough for any name connected with me to be fixed indelibly on your mind. May I ask, by the way, why you compare yourself to a lamb?"

He looked at me steadily. "A shorn lamb, Miss Jerningham. The point lies in the adjective. Since I have been travelling in the East I have had the thick, woolly growth of conceit and self-sufficiency which I brought from home shorn. And now I feel like a clipped lambkin; chilly and silly, and very young and foolish."

"A most wholesome frame of mind," I replied, carefully flicking the dried leaves off a caper shrub with my riding-cane. I did not want to look in his eyes any more. I knew he was apologising as far as he dared for the Rue de Pera incident. "So you had a special introduction to my father?" I said, in a non-committal tone. "You are, perhaps, interested in Assyriology?"

"There's some talk that the University of South Carolina may fit out an expedition, and I am to spy out the land."

“Ah, your University is doubtless emulous of the Pennsylvania University’s Nuffar triumphs. My father will be charmed to give you all the advice he can, I am sure.”

“I mean to worry his good-nature to distraction, Miss Jerningham. There does not appear to be any dog-in-the-manger business about Assyriology——”

A wild shout cut his sentence short. Piers rushed up, waving his arms.

“Boot and saddle, you two !” he shrieked. “Hurry up, for the sake of Tel Abou Khatoun, my children ! Wilbur, you are to have the roan, Alpha. Rathia, don’t you hear the row ? The mounted man you sent after the Frogs from El Awayi has come in, and he says they are probably not four hours north-west of the Tel by now !”

Chapter VI

MANY A SLIP——

WE hurried. The Arabs knew the unspoken object of the trip as well as we did ourselves, and, as they take Assyriology seriously, they dropped the strike when the spy shouted his news, and begged Papa in appealing falsetto to lead them to the Tel, that they might blacken the faces of our rivals and cause them to eat abomination and defeat before the eyes of all Al Jezireh and the farthest dwellers in Irak Arabi.

The servants and older men were left to bring on the baggage; the rest of us rushed off, helter-skelter, Piers on Gamma, the American on Alpha, Papa on Omega, and Evelyn on her ugly, sweet-tempered black hajin, Sakb. With us were our pretence escort of three zaptiehs, thirty workmen on foot with pick and basket shouldered, and Hajji Izzett. Arjamand caracoled gaily, as though my weight plus a couple of bags containing the firman, Union Jack, and some other needfuls, was less than nothing, and joyously tried to tempt Sakb to a romp. Howling their war-songs and letting off their firearms, the workmen stampeded after Hajji Izzett into the jungle. We followed with less noise. It was a heavenly morning, with a touch of tartness in the sunbathed air. The morning sun had scarcely warmed the jungle-tangle of dry grass, bushes, and little trees, in deeper hollows dewdrops lingered and gemmed the hoofs of the horses as they brushed through fallen trees.

Through the scrub the Arabs plunged, driving the natural denizens of the place before them in a panic. Pigeons and francolins rustled in terrified flocks, buzzards scuttled and lizards flashed out of the track, and hares and jackals fled intermixed in frightened droves. I saw two wild boars scurry out of the way, and Piers vows he beheld a lion—a real little dark Tigris lion with a claw in the tuft at the tip of his tail—run and hide before the onrush.

Piers headed the men and led the chants. Evelyn accompanied him, such a figure of faery on ugly Sakb; with a background of swarthy Arab mob and burnt foliage! Nothing will ever make an Assyriologist of her, any more than anything will do that service for Piers; but she had a born aptitude for learning and loving the works and songs and ways of the live country-folk, and he had the same, and more experience, and loved to teach. So she rode before our chocolate-coloured rabble, and sang the war-chants too, unashamedly, and the tame Arabs of the pick and basket remembered that time was when a woman was the natural leader of the hordes of Hejaz and Nejd and Yemen to the conquering of foes, and went frenzied; as civilised dogs will go frenzied at the call of the jackal pack, with memories of what their forbears were, and would have murdered our rivals if need asked.

Harvey Wilbur stuck to Papa, who was enacting whipper-in in the rear. Papa expected me to remain with him also, but it was maddening work to keep Arjamand to footmen's pace over the broken ground all webbed with roots and leaf-filled ditches. She was tearing my arms out and quivering with bridled energy like a bundle of springs and fire. "Meet you in the open, dad?" I cried at last, and gave her her head, spite of his shout of remonstrance.

The Banu Begum laid herself out, the air sang, the

trees raced back, we skimmed hollows and jumped fallen trunks, and, diving finally through a network of dried creepers starred with bright green lizards which corked up the end of the path we had taken came into the open on a little rise and reined up. Immediately, with a muffled pounding of hoofs, the American dashed through the creeper screen.

"Your father told me to escort you, as he cannot leave the men, Miss Jerningham," he said.

I had actually forgotten his existence for the moment in the joy of the excitement. The sight of him was like a cold douche. "It is unnecessary," I answered, frowning, then the delight of the day overmastered me again and I added, "Since you are here, Mr. Wilbur, what do you say to a race for the honour of being first on the Tel? The way is plain."

From our eminence we could see the Jebel Hamrin jutting up against the flushed sky, nearer to us Tel Abou Khatoun's twin points were clearly discernible, and patches of the track leading to it showed as scraps of light-tinted ribbons against the scorched browns and greens on the downland and its sprinkling of jungle patches and scrubby trees. Behind us the remainder of the party still struggled in the jungle; echoes of their noisy progress drifted out and now and then a frightened hyæna broke cover at the edge or a flight of partridges whirled out of the branches above.

"It would not be safe to separate from the rest of the party," my companion returned, quietly eyeing the calling road. "Your father mentioned that some Hammawands——"

"The Hammawands are the Bogy Man's *locum tenens* hereabouts, Mr. Wilbur. They never come so far west, and at present their most adventurous leader, Aziz Bey, is in Mosul jail waiting to be hung at the Nineveh end of the bridge. If you are afraid, however

—I mean if you are too much guided by the dictates of prudence to yield to the call of the open road on a young morning, will you at least kindly inform my father where I have gone ? ”

And, after flashing a mocking smile over my shoulder, I dashed down the track. I had not a dozen yards' start before the thunder of Alpha's hoofs was close behind. I whispered half a threat in Arabic into Arjamand's little prick ears, and made her put on steam. Her dainty shoes scarcely touched the ground between each sliding dart of her tense body, her silken mane lashed my knee, the road flowed like a river in spring spate back under her. And behind a quartette of hoofs thudded steadily and closely and the American shouted calm remonstrances.

The remonstrances were irritating enough; the fact that the man was actually keeping Alpha up to Arjamand for a while, and, consequently, extorted my unwilling respect as a fine rider, was maddening. For about the third time in my owning of her I gave the Banu Begum the spur, and, hoping to shake my pursuer off, turned her into a track which led down a nullah, a nearly dry watercourse, thick-grown with trees and shrubs. The American followed; he was saving his breath now, but I could hear his whip going strong. Alpha would be pounded soon by the blood of Kubleh.

Arjamand took the descent sure-footed as a leopard, splashed into the trickle of water in the cool shade at the bottom, and was instantly reined up violently as four mounted figures darted out of the bushes and surrounded me.

Harvey Wilbur, following, dived into the group before he knew it was there. He made a clutch for his hip pocket, but two men pinioned his arms, and within two minutes his thumbs were tied behind his back, and his feet roped together by a cord running under the

body of his horse. With one of our captors leading Alpha we were soon riding, side by side, along the watercourse, flanked by a guard of four Hammawands.

They were well enough mounted and all dressed in correct Kurdish costume: baggy shulwari and foal-hair jackets, all much the worse for wear; all wore the vast Kurdish turban and all were armed with Sniders of the latest design. The leader bore a dagger with the hilt decorated with very much flawed turquoises, and had the falcon angle of his Kurdish features interrupted by a broken nose. He was young; the other three were middle-aged, one aquiline-faced, the remaining two of a strong Tartar cast.

The American opened his mouth to speak, the chief administered a poke in the ribs with his rifle-butt which reduced him to gasping silence until we had ascended the other side of the nullah. A far-off yell attracted our attention over our shoulders. We saw, far behind, the jungle border and a cluster of figures before it; of the mounted units I could just distinguish Evelyn by her white habit. Three of the figures made a gesture in concert, three puffs of smoke hid part of them, three sharp barks reached my ears, and three bullets ploughed up three bits of dust from the baked land a good way short of the nullah, two more of the mounted figures rode sharply to the firers, Piers and Papa telling the zaptiehs they might hit me. The Hammawands then laughed and lashed the horses, and we set on again at a break-neck gallop.

For a space we pounded recklessly through wood and scrub and out of all view of the river. I was silent with rage; this was my own doing, Fate was perpetually putting me in a ridiculous light before Mr. Wilbur. I was glad of a chance to regain command of my startled composure, and, the others being men, talking was out of the question for them until we slackened speed and

proceeded over a stretch of scorched grass at a more reasonable speed.

"Good heavens, Miss Haroun, this is a nasty position!" exclaimed Mr. Wilbur then.

"My surname is Jerningham," I corrected, tucking up a loosened curl. "This is my fault, I acknowledge; but you need be under no apprehension at present, we are in no immediate danger. These are Hammawands; the chief and that tall one real Kurds, the others most probably deserters from the army or outlaws, classes from which the Hammawand tribe is constantly receiving added members; certainly they are *canaille* Turks. Most likely we have been taken as exchange for Aziz Bey. What troubles me is that we are riding due south away from Abou Khatoun——"

"Miss Haroun—Jerningham, I mean, the idea of your being able to think of Assyriology under the circumstances! It must be your ruling passion. Do you think your father will overtake us?"

"Not after our start. As a man of sense he will probably run down river to Tekrit, the nearest telegraph station, and wire for help to scour the country. And I fear he will forget to send any one to claim the Tel——"

"Ruling Passion!" he said with the air of one struggling with a psychological problem too stupendous to grasp.

We had, as we talked, gained an unsheltered plain; the dry earth gave out the heat it had been storing up through the previous day, the sun's rays beat down hotly, and the sight of our captors sharing round the contents of the bags they had snatched from my saddle was not calculated to have a soothing effect on my temper. The American's pockets hung inside out, his seal-ring, watch, and scarf-pin were gone, and his collar had been torn off when his gold studs were

scrambled for. I had escaped search by handing over all my valuables and the revolver at my waist. They spat on the Union Jack and flung it away for a Christian emblem, the leader took the firman, the others divided my private travelling requisites to the accompaniment of roars of laughter. The Kurd is vivacious, and the Turk easily amused; they extracted much harmless merriment out of the allotment of shares; the youngest member in particular, having been fobbed off with the puff-box for his share of the treat, after finding by personal experiment that the powder was not sugar, entertained his comrades by turning his iron-coloured mount to a dapple grey by the time the chief addressed Mr. Wilbur.

He used the Mosuleani dialect. The American shook his head. "The peace of Allah as Salam be on thee and thine, Beg Effendi," I interposed. "I will interpret; the Frankish Agha does not comprehend the tongue of the land. And why, O Beg, this foolish doing? We be scarce worth the plucking, as thou seest."

"Ye be Turks and we be Hammawands," he returned. The Hammawands have not loved their rulers since the time when, during some small-fry rebellion, a Turkish commandant surrounded their largest camp and turned his soldiery loose on the women and children.

If I were a Hammawand I would remember that too. Soothingly I said: "Thou art mistaken, Beg Effen'. We be not Turks—Allah forbid!—but folk from the far-off land of the Franks. We harm no man, but hire men to delve in the ground for Written Stones, and our presence is a blessing wheresoever we dwell, for no Turk dareth to lift hand against Kurd, Arab, or Naisri before our eyes. My companion is an Agha from the Frankish land of Yenghi Dunia, and I am by name Rathia, the daughter of the English Agha, Horne Jern-

ingham, who is now a Pasha of the Sultana Victoria of England."

"It hath been reported in our ears of the doings of ye Diggers of Curious Stones," he returned. "The shard was not the rose, O Khatoun, but it had dwelt with the rose, and, in the same fashion, the flea is not the swine, but it hath batted upon the swine, and thou, O Frankish Khatoun, art the friend of Turks. Wilt deny the seal and the Tughra of the Sultan of Roum, whom may An Nabi (on whom be peace!) and Ali his Vali send soon to burn in Gehenna, together with thee!"

He thrust the firman before my eyes. "It were well, thou Frank friend of Turks, to deal with thee as thy friends dealt with our women," he went on. "Thou shalt serve a purpose, however—Inshallah!—by remaining in ward until the Vali of Mosul sends my father, Aziz Beg, to release thee."

"So thou art Mehreb Beg?" I rejoined. "I counsel thee to release us, O Mehreb. We are here to look for Written Stones; do thou take us back to my father, and he will not only secure the safe return of Aziz Beg, but will make peace and prosperity for the Hammawand as long as we live here."

The chief spat in a bored way, as a rude European would have yawned over my wearily silly plea. "Look thou, Khatoun, will he first throw the Veil of Forgetfulness over our laying hands on thee?"

"At my intercession he will. By my mother's honour!"

"She was doubtless a Frank and a Naisri. I will not test thy vow."

I was furious. Still, reflecting that he was only an ignorant young clodhopper with a real store of bitter wrong to avenge on the Turks, I controlled myself and answered: "Mehreb Beg, I assure thee that by giving

up all hope of our friendship and aid for the bare release of thy father thou art even as Abdullah Ibn Kelabeh, who lost the garden of Irem for an onion."

"Khatoun, an onion secure in the grasp is more satisfactory than all Irem in prospective. Now do thou explain to the Frank Agha."

"The Vali will no doubt send along Aziz Beg when he hears the terms," said the American, when I had translated. "I feel more composed now."

"I do not," I replied morosely. "I feel as though I were coming to pieces—dissolving into my component ingredients—disintegrating alive. Papa going south—the Tel well lost—and it is all my fault!"

"It is, but you should wait until somebody else points out the fact to you, Miss Har—Jerningham," was the daring reply. "I had an idea that you people of the East believed in Fate, call it that—Kismet—Karma—*che sarà sarà*—what is written on the forehead—you know."

"Thanks for the consolation. Still, I'm sorry it was written on my forehead that I should lose the Tel for Papa and have to listen to a brace of common Southland Kurds and two low Turks guffawing over my pet *penates*!"

"The Tel lost! Ruling Passion!" he observed. "I say, Miss Haroun, are you sure you would not give your soul for permission and funds to pare Warka or Kaleh Shergat down to water-level?"

I almost laughed, and, to save my dignity answered, "Miss Jerningham, please," and so relapsed into silence and stared fixedly between the mare's ears to fight down tears of vexation. It was my fault, and Fate was always making me ridiculous before Mr. Wilbur. We rode a long time, for the most part through scraps of scrub and underwood and over coarse-grassed steppes. No other human being was visible,

and no sign of any habitation; when we struck a path the dust became intolerable, and as the sun mounted its rays beat down more fiercely direct each minute. It was nearly overhead when a violet line began to rise on the horizon to our right, quivering and palpitating against the nearly canescent sky.

"It can't be the hills!" cried the American suddenly.

"It is the Jebel Hamrin," I answered, shading my eyes and taking a look at the little compass on my charm bangle, now adorning Mehreb Beg's square brown wrist. "We are heading due north-east, and must have worked round in a curve."

"Exactly," he nodded. "And—Miss Haroun—are we actually making a bee-line for Tel Abou Khatoun?"

A double-pronged heap was lifting up before us, all brown and yellow with burnt grass and sand-drifts. "Verily this is Tel Abou Khatoun, O Rathia Khatoun," said the Beg, catching the name, "and upon Tel Abou Khatoun we will—please Allah—rest a while."

"After all, all is not lost, Mr. Wilbur," I said, brightening.

"Not at all," he agreed joyfully. "Our entertainers do not know about the Louvre Expedition, it is evident. The French may turn up and rescue us——"

"Mr. Wilbur! To be rescued by the French and to have them claim the mound afterwards——! I'd prefer a month in the dirty Hammawand camp——"

"Then what on earth are you so gay about all of a sudden, Miss Haroun?"

"That—Inshallah, as our Beg says—I'll claim the Tel yet."

"Miss Haroun!"

"Mr. Wilbur." I dropped my voice for all our captors' ignorance of English. "Have you ever heard of a man who could locate a lady's skirt pocket?"

“No, but what——”

“Our captors are but men.”

“It is not well that captives should speak over-long together in a tongue not understood of their masters,” interrupted the Beg, thrusting himself between us.

Chapter VII

THE RAPE OF THE MOUND

THE Tel was now very near. It was a straggling pile, covering many acres and cut up by ravines and the channels of winter torrents, dry at this season, into several separate heaps. Some miles to east of it the hills rose ; at its western end, the one we were approaching, its two highest points shot up, roughly conical mounds, sweeping gracefully apart and divided by a deep, steep-sided, dry watercourse. "The Ziggurat—sacred tower—is embedded in the highest heap, and the lesser probably contains a temple, and those beyond—to the east—the city," I could not resist saying to the American, after casting an Assyriological glance around.

"Ruling Passion going strong, though it's about 80 in the shade, and I'm sorry to notice you don't speak with your normal distinctness ; too thirsty, I presume," he returned, with such a pleasantly sympathetic look of appreciation that I had to smile back and hated myself for it directly. At that juncture a solitary rider came round the foot of the Temple Mound, a dapper little rider on a dapper little Gulf Arab. "M. Henriot !" I exclaimed.

Mehreb and a Turk dashed forward while the rest of us halted. Like the American, the Frenchman was taken too much by surprise to offer any resistance ; he was dragged to us in a few minutes. He was bound

like my companion, and to that I attribute his not falling out of his saddle at sight of me. "Mademoiselle Jerningham!" he gasped.

"I am delighted to see you looking so well, M. Henriot."

"I am ravished to behold Mademoiselle Jerningham," he returned, with the same expression of gallantry under difficulties that his great-grandfather probably displayed to the ladies who shared the tumbril with him. "The gentleman behind Mademoiselle—it is not M. Piers?"

I introduced them, they bowed solemnly, trussed as they were. "I do not see Madame," I added.

"She is some miles away," he answered. "I do not understand with ease the argot of our captors—am I to share with M. Wilbur the honour of being massacred in Mademoiselle Jerningham's company?"

I explained Mehreb's intentions. "I am relieved—on Mademoiselle's account," he began. Mehreb, who had been engaged in taking stock of the property he had taken from him, interrupted.

"Interpret for us, Khatoun," he ordered peremptorily. "Good, good," he added, when I had elucidated the new captive's identity. "The Vali will not refuse to exchange my father for three Franks. Allah Al Kerim hath sent to-day. Now on to rest, my children."

We entered the precincts of the Tel by the dried watercourse—a nasty way. The sun-rays seemed to be focused on the back of our necks by the ribbon-like opening overhead, the high sides radiated the heat they had been storing in their hard-baked interior through the summer; together with an exceedingly evil savour from the lines of dried and half-dried slime marking the level of different floods. A little ooze still adorned the bottom, and I could deduce that in winter a torrent deep enough to drown men raced that way, by token of

a skeleton splayed between two boulders like an overgrown spider.

I touched up Arjamand and entered with the Beg at the head of the troop. Our halting-place was half-way up the inner slope of the Ziggurat mound, where a small clump of trees—tamarisks and a few poplars—afforded a grateful patch of violet shade. At the roots grew a few blades of grass, for the rest the Tel presented a doleful view of broken ground, dry sand, and burnt earth. A huddle of grave-mounds and stones occupied the lower part of our slope and the low ground below it, and, as the jackals know the Arab habit of burying shallowly in high and lonely spots it was not a nice scene. One mangy animal was busy re-polishing a well-polished skull under the trees; on our arrival he left it and skulked about in the distance until Mehreb flung it at him and bade him begone for an ill-omened brute.

My fellows in misfortune were hauled off their horses and roped in a sitting posture to two trees. As a mere woman, I was allowed to move about as I liked; under surveillance, the horses were tethered, a sentry was posted on the Ziggurat top, and the other men set about unslinging their food-bags and water-skins.

“Have hope and confidence, *chère Mademoiselle*,” exhorted the Frenchman encouragingly. “Soon, very soon, my beloved spouse and my caravan will be here. Our hosts know nothing of them; it will be diverting when they walk up.”

The prospect scarcely looked inviting to me. “And to what do we owe the pleasure of your company, Monsieur?” I asked.

“You are probably aware that we departed from Mosul a few days ago. I rode ahead of the slow-moving caravan, and—*v’là*! And yourself, *Mademoiselle*?”

“I was captured a few hours ago, together with Mr.

Wilbur, when we chanced to be separated from the rest of the party which my Papa is bringing to start excavations on this very mound. My poor Papa is now looking for me down-river, and we—*v'là!*”

“But, Mademoiselle, this is extraordinary! I was coming myself for the honour of claiming this mound for the Louvre Expedition!”

M. Henriot is really a passable actor. He dissembled his chagrin at having his fears of my intentions confirmed well enough, and, being the sort of little dried-up Gaul whose eyes are pig-like and usually half shut in folds of plumpness, he had only to open them wide to pantomime astonishment perfectly. I looked as surprised as I could in return.

“But, Monsieur, this is extraordinary! A strange coincidence! So odd that you did not happen to tell any one in Mosul where you were bound!”

I looked a look all innocence and perplexity at him. Our eyes met, and we each fought an inclination to grin. “Mademoiselle, I perceive that, by an extraordinary concatenation of circumstances, we have both come on the same errand,” he said gravely. “The situation is of the romantic.”

I failed to see the romance. I was tired and rather hungry and dreadfully thirsty, Papa was lost, the firman in Mehreb’s keeping—good as lost; the Tel would be lost when the rest of the French came. Everything was lost, and a hurried inspection, with one eye shut, of the bridge of my nose confirmed my fear that it was beginning to peel with sunburn. And it was all my fault.

The very hopelessness roused the fighting instinct in me. I felt the blood of a hundred generations of warriors, Norman and Koreish and Abbasside, wake up and run faster in my veins, threw back my shoulders, thought comfortingly of that pocket overlooked by the

Kurds, and prepared to fight to the last ditch. "I think it is more of the Comic Operatic, Monsieur," I said. "The question is: which of us has claimed the Tel?"

"I must point out, Mademoiselle, that I left Mosul first."

"But I must point out, Monsieur, that I first set foot on the Tel."

"I noted it—what foresight! If only you belonged to the Louvre Expedition, Mademoiselle! I am not certain, however, that by the etiquette of Assyriology mere priority of entry confers proprietorship."

"I am sure it does not!" said the American truculently. I was all eyes at him until he added: "If it did, Monsieur, you could point out that you were here days ago."

I had actually forgotten that for a moment. The stranger from the West had the Assyriological instinct. It would have taken Piers a week's thought to notice that point unassisted. I almost liked the American *pro tem*. "Exactly," I assented, "the making of excavations is the surest proof of ownership; and the finding of antiquities clinches it—is it not so?"

"I believe that is correct, Mademoiselle," the enemy assented.

With the toe of my boot I then turned up a little of the loose earth and kicked out a fragment of the green-glazed pottery with which most 'tween and besides the rivers' mounds are peppered. On this I pounced with affected rapture. "Behold, Monsieur!" I cried. "A very fine specimen of Parthian ceramic art this! Now, Mr. Wilbur is witness that I have dug into the mound and unearthed an antiquity."

Mr. Wilbur, shouting with laughter, bore witness. The Frenchman was silent for a moment, amusement

and vexation warring for possession of his features, until he hit on a checkmate.

"Mademoiselle, it is ingenious; it is worthy of M. Morier's Hajji Baba, or your forefather, Le Grand Khalif! But—have you your firman in possession?"

"No, Monsieur," I was constrained to admit, "you have yours?"

"Our firman, Mademoiselle, is in the custody of Madame."

"Then, Monsieur, shall we make a bargain to save argument in the heat? Whoever with a firman in actual possession first makes excavations here shall be adjudged possessor?"

He assented heartily, evidently under the impression that our firman was hurrying down-river with Papa, while the rest of his party was coming on apace. Mr. Wilbur bore witness despondingly.

The man had now unpacked the provisions. The two male captives were permitted the use of one hand, balanced by a pistol-muzzle screwed into the corresponding ear, while they partook of their share of the collation: a swallow of leather-flavoured water from the communal skin, and a flap of bread nicely flavoured with grits of millstone, and were then tied up again. I fared better: fear of immediate pursuit over, Mehreb had leisure to be a little more civil. On the strength of a week spent in Baghdad he considered himself quite Europeanised and an expert in the proper treatment of Frankish ladies—a useful delusion, as his outward manifestation of it consisted of establishing me on a pile of rugs in the thickest shade while he sat at a respectful distance before me and shared with me the contents of the little basket which Monsieur had carried when, to do him justice, he rode ahead of his slow caravan like a brave son of France, disregarding possible danger to leave his wife with all the escort and to make sure of

the Tel. I must admit that Madame takes excellent care of her good man, as was evinced by the little snack. It fairly savoured of wifely arrangement. I felt sorry to think she had wasted her trouble for my regalement, and told Monsieur so over my shoulder. The trees to which they were tied were some distance off, and on the edge of the shade; Monsieur was melting visibly, but polite as usual. He assured me that Madame would be as pleased as he was that her efforts had proved of some service to me, and would only regret, with him, that part would go to Mehreb.

"As little as I can help," I replied. So I told Mehreb that the corned-beef sandwiches were pig and secured them all for myself. When I told Monsieur of it he roared, but the American looked shocked; as people new to the East always do at an unnecessary fib. Mehreb did not look too well fed, so I let him share the raisin and sesamum cakes undisturbed by boggy tales, and assured him the contents of the flask were not Khamr. That was policy; on somebody used to strict teetotalism even weak claret would have some effect helpful to my schemes. The Beg, being young, was accordingly vain, and I had him inside out in an eyelid's twinkle.

"There is a Mehreb Beg in the *Sherif Nameh*," I commented.

"My forefather, Khatoun." He swelled with gratification. A Kurd is as proud of an ancestor in the *Sherif Nameh* as an Englishman is of one in Domesday Book.

We talked pedigrees. "Verily the Vali will be cow-headed beyond the customary cow-headedness of Turks if he will not exchange my father for so great a Khatoun as thou," said Mehreb.

I asked of his proposed procedure. "First—Inshallah!—to take ye all to our village. Then to send

your firman to Mosul with one to say : ' Send my father to loose the bonds of the owner of this, or thou shalt see what thou shalt see, O Vali.' "

" And if the Vali refuses ? "

" Inshallah, I will cut the ears and the right hand from off the Agha from Yenghi Dunia, and send him to say : ' Thus shall be done to the Khatoun if my father cometh not to release her.' "

" And if the Vali is still obdurate, my brother ? "

" We will, Inshallah, cut the throat of the other Frankish Agha and send him, packed in salt and sawdust, with the Khatoun's ears and hand and a live man to say, ' Thus shall be done to the Khatoun if my father cometh not.' "

Really the man expected God to condone a lot of ruffianism ! " And if, even then, he will not agree ? " I demanded.

For answer he made a long arm and put the point of his khanjar to my throat. I looked at him scornfully along the shining blade and said : " Well ? "

He drew it round, inflicting a trifling scratch. " That is all ? " I sneered. " 'Tis but a threat."

" A threat will be enough for the Vali," he returned. " The Turks are dogs and crawlers and eaters of scraps to the Franks, and the Franks worship their women, and it is written : ' Beat but the idols and the priests tremble.' "

" By Allah Al Majid, the Khatoun never flinched ! " the other Kurd exclaimed. " Verily, Mehreb Beg, my father, thou hast eaten dirt ; it is ill to spill blood wantonly. Pray Allah we pay not for it ! "

Pay-time was nearer than he expected. " Beg Effendim ! " bawled the sentry. " We are very safe now, come and see the Khatoun's father searching for her ! "

" Come too, Khatoun," said Mehreb.

We climbed the Ziggurat height. It was confusing at first to emerge from the shade into the glare of the noon sky and the shadeless, sun-bathed panorama outspread around. A silvery-green ribbon of water cut through the plain far off, and a dark square was moving southwards along it. "Thy father searches for thee southwardly, Khatoun," sneered Mehreb, handing me my own binoculars.

"Verily," I replied, sweeping the horizon. "Tell me, though, what is that that fares southwardly towards us?"

He seized the glasses and stared. "By the beard of An Nabi (on the which be peace!) a large party!"

"The friends of the Agha thou didst capture at the foot of the Tel," I replied placidly.

"'Subhan' Allah! Speed, Obeidullah, son of Hasan; bid the others mount, and mount the two Aghas."

The sentry ran. Mehreb screeched directions to him until he was off the height, then turned to me. And, turning, surveyed the barrel of the revolver I had whipped out of the special pocket in my skirt—surveyed it with a distinct squint as the muzzle was set against the bridge of his nose.

"The one at my belt was a blind," I observed. "This is a seven-shot, and loaded—by my mother's honour! Take my word for it, lest I prove it by scattering the brains of a Hammawand fool about the Tel! Raise thine hands!"

A real mountain Kurd would have launched for me and lost his brains like a man, but this was only a half-breed southland specimen. He was wise in his generation, and obeyed. Where we stood the others could not see us, I made my captive back until we were on the inner edge of the rough table-land which made the top of the Ziggurat. I stood a little above and facing

him and, as his back was to the men, I could cover him and see them at the same time.

"Ha, my sons!" I cried.

They were preparing for departure, two beginning to unbind the white men, the sentry attending to the horses. At my call they ran together half-way up the slope. For a few moments their eyes were dazzled by the flaring sky against which I was outlined darkly, and, availing myself of the pause, I called again.

"Touch not your arms unless ye be aweary of the rule of Mehreb, son of Aziz!"

Peering now under cupped hands, they took in the situation clearly. It would be futile to aim at me; even to desert-bred eyes my figure heaved and palpitated against the glaring sky. And the Beg was between. "This is a seven-shot, and it is like shooting at a mark with ye in the shade," I proceeded. "Raise your hands ere I count three, or Mehreb Beg dies, and others of ye to boot. One——"

Mehreb was popular. Three pairs of hands went up in a bunch, like the leaves of some plant I remember noticing at Kew, and three guns fell from supporting elbows.

"Heed me not, but shoot, in the names of Ali and the Imaums, my children!" Mehreb exhorted in a shriek. "The Franks come with zaptiehs to hale us to Mosul—and, Ya Allah Al Muhaimin—four men of the Hammawands to yield to a woman!"

I had, without removing my eyes, transferred the little armoury of daggers and the two pistols from his girdle to my own belt. Only one of the other three carried a pistol, he dropped one hand and drew it. Before he could aim a bullet shattered the lock.

"I have fired to warn; next I will fire to wound," I snapped, swinging my seven-shot back to its old position so that Mehreb was fain to blink because the muzzle

smoked. "Throw your knives on the guns and step back five paces."

They now made no demur about obeying, sending Mehreb to stand with them, I took my own position in front of the weapons. It had all taken a bare few minutes, and the two white men had not found tongue until now. They called anxious inquiries.

"In a moment, Monsieur; in a moment, Mr. Wilbur," I replied, still eyeing the Kurds. "You will perceive that it is impossible for me to release you at present. Now we will speak, Mehreb Beg."

"With my men I will speak," answered the Beg bitterly. "Tell me in mine ears, my children, is it better to go before the Vali and to hang beside Mosul bridge, or to die here at the hands of this tiger's-cub of a woman?"

"Whichever fate is to be ours, Allah hath written on our foreheads. He is great, compassionate, and merciful!" the other real Hammawand replied. "If His servant and thine, O Beg, might choose, though, it is better to be hung by men than shot by a woman."

"After capture by a woman," growled Mehreb.

"A tiger's-cub," I corrected, feeling quite sorry for them. "My brethren, ye cannot escape my shots, but, please Allah, while the zaptiehs hale ye to Mosul many things may happen."

Mehreb sulked still, but to the eyes of the others sprang hope—hope of a few more hours or, maybe, days, spent by their souls in the bodies they had fitted into for so long. They whispered.

"It is well spoken, Khatoun," Mehreb answered at last. "We be thy booty. We submit. It is Allah's will. Looking for a day of revenge. Our arms be weary; is it thine august will, O Vanquisher of Warriors, that we lower them and rest until the zaptiehs are come?"

“Nay, not so.” I sat on a stone beside the guns with my back to the captives under the trees. “To go to Mosul, that the Vali may do to ye as Allah hath decreed, is the due for molesting peaceful Children of the Road; but first ye must pay for this.”

I touched my throat. “Pay?” repeated the four blankly.

Chapter VIII

THE CLINCHING "FIND"

MY manœuvres had brought the Hammawands in front of a high, projecting bank, a kind of excrescence on the slope, left, as an Assyriological eye could see, by the last season's rain washing the looser earth and debris away from it. It suggested the end of a buried wall. Still fixing the Kurds with my eyes, I felt for a knife, thrust the blade under the stone on which I was seated, snapped it, and flung the hilt and its jagged appendage of a couple of inches of steel to the Beg. "Mark a square of five paces each way on the ground," I ordered.

He obeyed, amazed. I treated three more knives in the same way and threw them to his followers. "Dig all," I commanded. "Dig within the lines as deep as may be until I bid ye cease."

"Allah the Inheritor! It is a great grave for us!:" cried one.

"It will be less trouble for me to send ye living to the hanging than to explain your carcasses," I returned, knowing an ounce of solid reason was worth tons of argument. "Dig, or before I count three—Allah knows what will be. One—two——"

They dug. Dug clumsily owing to indifferent tools, inexperience, and the heat. By feeling I took each of the rifles in turn with my left hand and discharged them. Then I bunched them together by the muzzles and

dragged them with me as I adjourned to a more comfortable seat under the shade of a broken bank.

"Is it Ruling Passion still?" demanded the American's voice.

I answered without ceasing to eye the workers "You must excuse my not turning, M. Henriot, Mr. Wilbur. I can now spare a moment to express my regret that I cannot yet release you. The situation is equally humiliating to all three of us——"

"Humiliating to you, Miss Jerningham?" exclaimed the American. "You are all right—running about like an Amazon or a Guardian Angel with a six-shooter; but look at us! Two grown men sitting mumchance while the lady of the party——"

"Bullies Kurds," I completed. "When you think it over, you will perceive that my disgust at enacting so brutal and unfeminine a rôle must be exactly parallel to your own, and M. Henriot's, at filling a passive one. And, really, you have both exhibited great strength of mind by not troubling me with advice—— But the men whisper together."

And I gave a résumé of the whisper aloud. "My brother in the green and black turban sayeth that belike my striking his revolver was but a happy chance and, mayhap, I am unable, after the manner of women, to hit a man at two paces of deliberate intent. Let him observe the blue potsherd by his left foot."

All observed. My revolver barked and the shard flew piecemeal.

"Allah 'r Rashid, the Khatoun is a great director of bullets!" the doubter exclaimed. "That is, unless it was another lucky chance. Let her break this stone also."

"Yea, verily, and let her also hit this and this mark to boot until her shots be all spent," I responded, allowing a slow, ostentatious smile—the oriental equivalent

for the tongue in the cheek—to steal across my features. "Ye do mistake: I am from Mosul, not from Ahwaz."

It is a localism that the air of Mosul makes people sharp, while that of Ahwaz breeds Bœotian stupidity. The captive ex-captors laughed guiltily in concert. "Khatoun!" cried the late doubter. "You are wise as Allah—Allah, who is wise, compassionate, and merciful. O wise Khatoun, be like to Him in compassion and mercy too! The zaptiehs come to take us; it was decreed, we men bow to the decree, but, conquering Khatoun, we have wives and little ones! The Vali will in his wrath send troops—and you can guess, conquering Khatoun! Will you of your grace say a word——"

"Thine appeal is of no influence with me in respect to my intentions regarding ye all," I replied coldly. "To the digging again!"

In a little while Mehreb turned to me a face blackened with angry emotion and work, head-down in the heat. "We dig for Curious Stones, is it not?" he inquired. "Here is one," and he rolled a large octagonal cylinder, inscribed and little mutilated, to me.

Assyriology is boltered with dramatic moments. As the Beg spoke he stood up to rest himself. Now to extract the cylinder out of the ground they had burrowed some way under the buttress-like projection, and as they did so a brace of wide perpendicular cracks had run up and down the mass above. He leant all his weight for a moment on a hand against one of these, it widened and, with a rush and clatter, a mass of earth came down on the workers.

It was not much in quantity, insufficient to knock them flat, but an avalanche could not have had more effect on their nerves. With a concerted scream of horror they shook themselves free of the fallen soil and

shards, fled some paces, and huddled together staring and too frightened to remember my pistol for the nonce, or even to run away.

"Abu 'l Houli!" shrieked Mehreb. "It is an Afrit! It is Nimrod—it is Ibrahim 'l Khalil—Ali Ulahi—it is Allah Himself!"

"Juste ciel, un Kirabu!" exclaimed the voice of M. Henriot.

"Great Scott, a statue!" the American commented.

"It is but a Curious Stone, my sons," I said. "And, please you, remember my seven-shot."

It was really a sight to startle unaccustomed beholders. It was as though some long-buried giant had stirred in his grave and thrust part of his head, all streaked with earth and the blanched mould of the sepulchre, out of the ground. The slope was now in shade, but out of it, high above the men's heads, amidst the crumbling earth the upper half of a gigantic face projected and caught some sunlight on its clear-cut features. A hooked nose, vast, shadowed brows, under them swollen eyeballs, dead and white but for the purple-painted pupils, a flat cheek with little curls creeping on it, and a square mouth melting into waving locks, all whitened with age and long burial where dust and soil and ashes did not smear them. And the bleached terror of it all, tall from underlip to brow as a man's waist, framed in the dusky earth. A sight of terror to the ignorant Kurds, but to me one of rapture.

We had, by one of Allah's chances, lighted on a marble man-headed bull or lion flanking the gate of some long-buried temple or palace. M. Henriot was a man of honour: the Tel was mine.

"A Curious Stone?" said Mehreb, beginning to gather together his composure. "Belike it is one of the images which were smitten asunder by Ibrahim 'l Khalil—on whom be peace!—in the house of his father

Therach in the days before the days of Noah—peace upon him ! ”

And that was quite good archæology for a Southland Kurd. “Even so,” I agreed. “Your work is now done; do ye stand by the horses.”

They were in a sorry plight, staggering as they walked, nearly worn out, utterly dispirited, as I had foreseen, by unaccustomed work in the heat, and wriggling uneasily on account of their clothes sticking to their oozing skins. I shepherded them round the trees out of sight of the Frenchman and American. “Throw on the ground all ye took from the Aghas and from me, and then on that your cartridge belts,” I ordered.

“To be wholly spoiled by a woman—it is too much ! ” snarled Mehreb. “Shoot, Khatoun; we have eaten abomination enough.”

“Come, come,” I returned good-humouredly. “If ye would die, at the least die in a rush upon me. But will ye give up Irem for an onion again? The Irem of possible escape from the zaptiehs for an onion of certain death at my hands?”

They half growled and half laughed. A little heap of trinkets and odds and ends, removed from thievish saddle-bags, wrists, girdles, and fingers, accumulated at my feet on the belts.

“Now mount and ride before the zaptiehs come,” I said quietly.

They rubbed their sweat-filled eyes and glared dazedly. “There be your horses, mount and be gone,” I went on. “Why should I weary myself bearing witness against ye at Mosul? What am I that I should bring the soldiery upon your women and little ones? Istafar Allah! Go in peace, as I meant ye should from the first.”

“The Khatoun jesteth,” faltered the Beg.

“Nay, not so. Ye captured me and then I captured

you. The scales balance. Also Mehreb scratched my throat, and for that ye have scratched the ground and have paid me blood-money of a Curious Stone. *Lex talionis*. Go."

"This is empty mercy, Khatoun," Mehreb shook his head. "Thy father will hear and tell the Vali of thy mishappenings——"

"How can the Vali find ye if I profess I know not your names? Will he send to slaughter all the Hammawands for sake of four unknown men of the tribe who did no harm to a party of Franks who laugh at the happening?"

"The two Aghas——" he hinted.

"A woman who can subdue four Hammawands can surely persuade two men of her own kind to back any tale she chooses to tell. Now, my brethren, ye can hide the loss of your cartridges and small-arms, and supply new, but the loss of your guns is a different matter. Therefore, as ye have not the wherewithal to load them and shoot me, ye may go and take them again. Let each man sling his securely on his back ere he moves from the spot where they are—am I of Ahwaz, that I should let ye come within distance to club me if ye had them free?"

They rushed, feverishly eager but with the gaze of men in a trance, to secure the guns. The captives round the grove bellowed anxious inquiries to me.

"Khatoun, thou art as Allah, who is great, compassionate, and merciful!" said Mehreb, turning with outspread hands. "Truly we have lost Irem for an onion!"

"And the onion is lost now!" I concluded drily.

From the top of the Ziggurat I watched, with both revolvers cocked, until the Kurds melted into the palpitating noon horizon and the French were within ten minutes' ride of the Tel. Since I had driven the

Kurds round the trees out of sight of the two Europeans my fellow captives had been making the mound noisy with falsetto inquiries after my welfare. I let them shout while I attended to more pressing business.

After loosing Arjamand and sorting my property out of the common heap I tidied myself a little with the aid of my recovered assets, hid the cartridge-belts under a tombstone, and finally sauntered round the trees.

The men were in the last stage of dishevelled demoralisation with ineffectual tugging at their bonds. "Miss Jerningham! Thank God you're safe!" exclaimed the American, as I made my appearance with Arjamand trotting, dog-like, at my heels.

"You two appear awfully excited," I remarked, deliberately replacing my left earring. "Did you want me? I was speeding the going guests. Our Kurdish visitors have gone."

"Gone?" repeated Harvey Wilbur. "When we saw them race for the guns we thought *you* were gone for certain——"

"You forgot that the guns were unloaded," I returned, hooking in the other ring and disengaging my back hair from Arjamand's efforts to make a snack of it. "You see, M. Henriot, your caravan is now within hail of the Tel; the Kurds, knowing it, risked my pistols and made a dash for the guns and horses. I did not fire at them; I am opposed to useless bloodshed."

The men looked at one another in an offensively meaning way. "*Ma foi!* Mademoiselle," said M. Henriot, "I believe you let them escape in the kindness of your heart."

"You do, Monsieur? Then when I tell my tale to Madame you are at liberty to express your belief that I tamper with the truth."

"I wish you'd have the kindness to unloose me and hand me one of those shooting-irons, Miss Har—Jern-

ingham," the American put in hastily. "It might be a good move in case our friends return."

"They won't return as long as they think I'm about. And there is a difficulty about releasing M. Henriot——"

"Mademoiselle!"

"—And it would look like favouritism if I released you alone, Mr. Wilbur."

"Miss Jerningham!"

"But I am anxious to release M. Henriot, and will do so if——" here I unfolded the firman, and waved a hand to the giant head.

The Frenchman burst into a jolly laugh. "*Chère Mademoiselle*, I know when I am beaten by my master. You have most truly earned the Tel. I concede the victory, and only beg of your grace that you will settle all with Madame."

"Yes, Miss Jerningham," the American added. "We men would be ashamed to tell of this morning's adventures. Eh, M'sieu?"

M. Henriot nodded, and shuddered. I cut their bonds. The Frenchman seized my hand and kissed it.

"Viva Mademoiselle, fille du Grand Khalif, Impératrice d'Assyriologie!" he cried.

"Hear, hear!" the American shouted heartily. He took my hand before I could withdraw it, and suddenly released it, with a swift glance into my eyes which I would have read as apology for a checked liberty if I had not known it was really a memory of the wood by Sliwa Klissia. We both went red, and my triumph was flat.

A spattering of shots and shouts announced the near approach of the French. They boarded the Tel in style. The zaptiehs first, the Shammar lesser Sheikh who was their safe-conduct next, then Madame herself, her trim person sandwiched between a wall-eyed Karabagh roan and a big white umbrella. Nazim

Effendi, the Stamboul Museum Polite Spy of the party, followed with a couple of score workmen and a few overseers. In the rear the Katerjis tailed off, remonstrating with the baggage mules, which had stampered at the firing.

Madame had dismounted when I topped a dune and stood revealed. My companions in misfortune modestly tried to hide behind me; they bore evidence past cavil of a morning's adventures in the dirt. I flatter myself I was as fresh and crisp as Madame herself. She said: "Juste ciel!" and held up her hands. Nazim Effendi said, "Allah Al Kebir!" and held up his. The zaptiehs had levelled their guns; they lowered them and said: "Subhan' Allah! Mosuleani Khatoun!" The workers took, severally, verbal refuge in Allah from Satan the Stoned. Only the grooms went on undisturbed in their business of chasing mules in the middle distance.

"Mademoiselle Rathia!" said Madame faintly.

I sailed down, all outstretched hands and welcoming smile. "*Chère Madame!*" I said. And we fell into one another's arms and kissed, as gently-bred women do when they would rather bite. "I am glad to welcome you to my Tel——" I proceeded. "Nazim Effen', thou art welcome——"

"Your Tel? Thine?" shrieked Madame, glancing round me in search of the rest of my party. Her eye rested on the giant head and remained fixed.

"Eh bien!" she exclaimed. Her followers, with one accord, took refuge from the Lapidated One several times in succession.

"My first—no, my second discovery," I announced. "You will congratulate me. But I forget the ceremonies of civilisation in my joy at meeting you, *chère Madame.*"

I introduced Mr. Harvey Wilbur. She dismissed him

with a glance. "Thou wilt perhaps enlighten me, my Hippolyte," she said tartly.

"Mademoiselle will explain all, *ma chère Angélique*."

"Directly," I obliged. "Let us sit on this bank, dear Madame; you will be as fatigued after your ride as I am with superintending my excavations——"

"Your excavations?"

"Exactly; and you will rejoice with me that I have already found a cylinder—Asshur Dan, if I read the name aright. I forget, though, your disappointment. Monsieur has informed me that you were coming to try the Tel. What a pity you did not let us know betimes! Our interests have clashed; I am almost sorry that, as first comer, I have obtained the prize!"

"Your papa is here?" She knew she might have some chance with a man as chief opponent.

"Not yet. Nevertheless, I have claimed the Tel. Eh, Monsieur?"

To her consternation he nodded sadly. "Oui, certainement."

"Hippolyte!" Her voice rose, icy with meaning; the poor man shivered, for all he was mopping his steaming forehead. "I see a hole, a half-uncovered Kirabu head, and some broken knives, Mademoiselle," she proceeded. "Where are the workers?"

My explanatory tale, delivered in a circle of rapt listeners, was only untruthful in four details. I multiplied the foe by four, to save the feelings of my companions, and dilated on the prodigies performed by M. Henriot before he was overpowered. For sake of Mehreb and his feminine and infantile belongings, I said our captors had taken us with views of a hard cash ransom. I implied that the classical good looks of the leader had inflamed my girlish imagination, and was puzzled about his name.

"I think it was Suleiman," I hesitated, "or Achmet."

M. Henriot, Mr. Wilbur, was the man's name Achmet or Suleiman ?"

The two developed different expressions over my little ruse. The Frenchman tried to pantomime appreciation with the side of his face that was turned to me, and at the same time to sport a look of chastened regret with the other half for Madame's benefit. The American simply bowed to my inquiry.

"Achmet, I believe, Mademoiselle. You will remember best, as you were interpreter." M. Henriot backed me nobly.

"This is interesting, *chère* Mademoiselle," said Madame. "It is of the romantic, the dramatic, but is it Assyriology ?"

"I have M. Henriot's word," I replied.

"It is so, my beloved Angélique," her husband added. "I am desolate that this so promising site is lost to us, but past cavil Mademoiselle Rathia was first on the Tel."

"I am willing to let our respective Ambassadors lay the case before the Padishah," I added. "The Tel to be neutral in the interim."

Whereat the French colours went down at discretion. We had far more influence at Yildiz than they ever possessed.

The American, with a zaptieh and guide, ran the rest of the Oxford Expedition to earth at Tekrit that evening. Papa was in the Telegraph Office, wiring Mosul for troops, while Piers, the Mudir, and Evelyn reviewed redifs and volunteers preparatory to a night hunt. They turned the hunt into a triumphal march, re-crossed the river, and reached the Tel in time to save Madame from having to share her tent with me for the night.

So ended the brilliant guerilla engagement of Tel Abou Khatoun.

Chapter IX

KHORSABAD THE SECOND

THE French left first thing in the morning. We offered them one of the smaller heaps for their very own use, one that I was sure was only a necropole mound. Monsieur Henriot seemed inclined to stay and have a shot at it, but Madame could not take her defeat in a sporting spirit. So they went, and we set about arranging the camp.

Our tent was pitched near the summit of the Ziggurat mound; there we could command a view of all the Tel and miles of country, and feel like the chatelaines of a feudal castle overlooking its vassal town. A little lower down the slope was Papa's little tent and what Miksi called the "Drawing-parlour" tent. Still lower was a magic circle formed by the servants' quarters and a line of stones, beyond which no one unconnected with the household was permitted to pass on pain of offhand corporeal pains and penalties. The workers ran up huts of stone and reeds at the foot of the mound, out of our sight, and Piers and the American set their tent near-by, to keep order and to act as outpost in the possible but improbable case of an attack by Kurds or Bedawin.

I always do things decently and in order. Left to themselves, the men would have camped on the nearest low spot, and then wondered why they were ridden by chills and malaria.

All was arranged in a few hours, and it was delightful to sit under my own tent-flap watching the men on the other mound, the Temple mound, scurrying about like ants as they began to tunnel into the bank beside my Kirabu in search of his twin and the buried hall whose door they probably flanked. Under changed and rosy aspects the view, so dismal the day before, was charming. The Tel was now our Tel, the sand-slopes and tombstones, which had been dusty yellow and dirty grey twenty hours before, were now all gold and pearl, the few trees were emerald-leaved as those of Sheddad's Irem, the cloudless sky had taken its proper guise of the Floor of Heaven, the canescent sun was no whit too hot—on our own Tel.

There was but one jarring note, the necessary crumpled rose-leaf—there should have been only two white men. In the middle of the greatest triumph of my career there thrust in the cloven hoof of my bitterest humiliation. Well, it could not be helped. Kismet—or rather Karma, the fate you concoct for yourself, had foisted the American on me; my only course was to try and not think he was thinking of that wood by Sliwa Klissia whenever we met.

Within a week the whilom solitary Tel became the most populous spot between Tekrit and Kirkuk. The magic words, "The Diggers of Curious Stones are at Tel Abou Khatoun!" went round like the fiery cross and raised the country-side. All the villagers of Khatounabad and every other hamlet within many miles of the Tel came down with one accord, and said the Tel was their property, and would we pay bakshish or clear out? We neither paid nor went. Instead, we hired a gang of labourers from each place at the usual remuneration of two piastres per head *per diem*, and hope of a twopenny rise if they became skilled workers, and for this they kept their fellow-

villagers in order. Wandering tribes who pastured their flocks on the Tel on the scarce occasions when there was a sparse bit of grass there, marched on us with the same alternative demands. We pacified them in the same way, and, as all the hired men, nomad or sedentary, made themselves reed-huts or pitched tents in the plain around, the place soon lost its lonely air. We had six hundred men on the pay-roll, and as to the sum of their relatives and friends who came and picked up a modest living under our shadow, we never knew it. We did not inquire; meanness is not the mode round about the Two Great Rivers; the custom is to give with both hands and a friendly word. And if you give until you have nothing left you can sponge on some one else who is able to give. This bears some resemblance to the earliest Early Christian way.

Not that we ran short that season. We came to stay two weeks, stayed much longer, and left with pockets that still jingled. This was brought about by the unusual dilatoriness of the rainy season, and judicious use of the telegraph.

The miracle of the wire that speaks! The day after our pitching camp Piers rode to Tekrit, a greasy Lesghian operator manipulated the keys, and within a span of hours a group of world-renowned savants in far-off Oxford were conning this specimen of infinite verbal riches in a little space.

“ASSYRIAN FUND COMM., OXFORD, ENGLAND.

“TEL-ABOU-KHATOUN, near Tekrit, another Khorsabad; heureka pedigree cylinder Tiglathpilesar primus deluge tablet cylinder Ashurdan; funds low.—JERNINGHAM.”

Another span of hours, a return miracle, and we gloated over this.

“JERNINGHAM, TEL-ABOU-KHATOUN, TEKRII.

“Congratulations; wiring two thousand; usual Mosul banker; compliments. Miss J. and Miss E.—Fund Comm.”

We worked with system. The state of the cemetery shocked us; we therefore had all the stray bones collected and buried deep, under the superintendence of the great Sheikh Abd Ul Khedr of Kirkuk. This gentleman was the famed saint to whom Abdul Hamid applied by telegraph for his prayers and blessings on the Armenian Massacres before the signal to begin was given; we imported him specially, and it was very profitable for us. The Moslems were impressed by our fulfilling of the Seventh Work of Mercy, and we were able to make some observations when our men dug the fosse commun. We found that the site of the cemetery was over an important ruin, and made a mem. to attend to it later. We were not allowed to excavate in graveyards, of course, and we might not have risked the money and trouble necessary to doing it in a hole-and-corner way if we had not been certain that the results would justify the expenditure.

Then we dug the earth away all round my Kirabu. It turned out to be a winged lion in fine alabaster. It was in perfect preservation, though its fellow crumbled away to powder on exposure to the air when we found it after some tunnelling. They flanked the main door of a temple; when the fane was sacked and burnt six and twenty centuries ago the one had been burnt to lime, while the other remained intact. Islam! We drove a tunnel between them, and then it was the stock tale of a successful Assyrian excavation.

Hall after hall was cleared, passage after passage, court after court. Most of them were lined head high with bas-reliefs, some whole, some lime. Every chamber

yielded treasure-trove: altars and *ex votos*, libation bowls and jars, votive cones and statuettes, bells and cymbals, inscribed tablets from the temple library, and cooking cauldrons, plates, and beakers from the temple kitchen. We found the name of the temple, too. It was E'Anna, the Heavenly Fane erected by Asshur Dan in honour of his patron goddess, Ishtar, Lady of War. The mounds to east covered the bones of the city Dur-Asshur Dan. And in the middle of each room, and across the doorways, and in every corner, were little piles of flaking scales of armour, broken helmets, rusted swords, and scraps of mouldering bone, relics of the warriors and the soldier-priests who had died hard, face to the foe and group by group, when their sanctuary fell in days before Judah ceased to be a kingdom and when Tyre ruled the waves from Ind to Gades and the Tin Islands where our own forbears wore woad and burnt victims to nameless Celtic and Iberian gods.

In a few days the hut we had built in the enclosure to shelter possible treasures was nearly full, and Evelyn and I devoted our spare time to labelling the finds. By that time our experienced workers had infected the raw hands with their own enthusiasm for the trade, and every soul about the Tel took passionate interest in the discoveries. And they took the occasional representations of elephants for giant pigs, and held firmly to the belief that we Frankish Christians worshipped them in the hut at night.

They worked in gangs of seven: two Chaldæans to break the soil with pick and fork, two strong Arabs to shovel the loose mould into baskets, three others to carry the baskets away and empty them over the edge of the mound, and from dawn to dusk the Tel was like a beehive turned inside out. The pickmen worked in clouds of dust, the shovel-men in thicker billows, the

basket-men staggered off with full loads to tip out and aid in raising the densest cloud of all; those with empty baskets raced back howling.

Every one yelled incessantly, and, as the names of saints and prophets and the most serious Name of all are made very cheap in Asiatic Turkey, the general tone was unedifying.

"In Name of Allah, you pickmen, give us more soil!" screamed the basket fillers.

"In Name of Allah, and of the Imaums most blessed, do ye haste, O our brothers the fillers!" bawled the carriers.

"I take refuge in Allah from Satan the everlastingly stoned!" grunts the man who is tipping out his load.

"Alhamdu'l-llah! Curses be everlastingly on the Stoned Satan!" lilts the one who is capering back to the Kirabu.

And so on, *ad nauseam*. They worked all day, from Morning Prayer to Sunset Prayer, with two stops for Noon and Afternoon Prayer, and rested for an hour or so when the sun was straight overhead and the children trotted over from huts and tents with the bowls of millet paste or little cakes of millet bread that formed the one daylight meal. They rarely had anything better, but were well content, happy fellows!—laughing and telling stories as they ate in the shade of the trenches, and then passed round the single jar of water and shared a pipe together. We had all the drinking water brought from a decent spring some miles away, and it was a positive luxury to men who were accustomed to drawing their supply from brackish desert wells, or from village ponds where the village washing was also carried out and the village animals found a long last home. They counted themselves lucky folk, and did not envy the Padishah or Sultana Victoria on the days when a pedlar from Tekrit or Mahmudiah

happened to wander on the Tel with an ass-load of tobacco or dates and we bought his stock for distribution.

Ourselves we led a patriarchal life, tempered by deck chairs, novels, and other small comforts. Before dawn, by the light of Al Tarek, we went for a canter about the Tel or a gallop on the plain, while the overseers got the men up. After early breakfast serious work began; the three men superintended, and we attended to the commissariat and household affairs in general, labelled and docketed finds, and interviewed the sick who came for treatment and little children who made a business of raking over the waste soil for stray fragments of Antikahs and sold them to me for sweetmeats and small change.

When the tunnels and trenches had been driven far from the tents the men had lunch sent out, but they always made themselves presentable and came to camp at five p.m. "I've noticed that, whether it's Belgrave Square, Seven Dials, or an Assyrian Tel the men invariably turn up at tea-time," Evelyn observed. And she noted the fact in her diary, directly after an entry about a tablet that sheds light on the siege of Jerusalem under Sennacherib.

It would have been an earthly paradise but for the American. His presence was like a shadow that brooded over and spoilt all the sunlit days and scented nights. It was galling, too, when after a time I realised that I would have found him a welcome comrade if——!

If only I could have met him without seeing every time recollection of the Rue de Pera and speculation about the wood of Sliwa Klissia in his eyes.

He picked up the theory and practice of Assyriology with a speed that endeared him to Papa; he learnt vernacular Arabic, gutturals and all, at an astonishing

rate; he stood the sun and the autumn climate as few griffins can; he could keep his temper with the most irritating gang of diggers; and what a blessing he was in the long evenings!

Oh those evenings on Tel Abou Khatoun! Those spans of Elysian rest after days of strenuous work, when dinner was done with, and the sun had dipped, and the moon and stars made half a white daylight, and our workers' songs drifted up, distance-softened, from the fires by the base of the Ziggurat hill! We would pitch our chairs on the summit and watch the stars pace half the sky, the world spread forth, far beneath us; a vast, dusky target, roughened at the eastern verge by a toothed black line of hills and cut across the opposite rim by the glinting river, and talk of the day's work and the work that would be—Furdah Inshallah! Sometimes Papa would talk of the stars, and of the folk who had stared at them in their time from the land where we now eyed them in our turn. He generally began with Nimrod and ended with George Smith of the prosaic name and romantically premature fate. One's head whirled to think of it—the same bright spheres, and the same old earth, and the uncountable myriads of eyes and feet that had gazed at the one and trodden the other, and had become wind-blown dust and ashes since Abram Ibn Therach went that way on his route from Ur to Haran, and looked on the silver marvel of the Chaldæan Host of Heaven, and had the strength of brain and soul to see the One and Only One beyond!

And sometimes he would discourse of the farther stars, thrusting a hand into the light and saying that the white beam on it had taken three centuries to reach the earth; it had left its parent orb when the thunder of the Armada guns was echoing back from the English cliffs, and for all we knew that orb might have died into

dark since then, for all we thought we saw it up in the blue velvet sky.

It was very horrid. Evelyn's sapphire eyes would grow dusky and fearful, as though the light shining into them from the stars she was looking at was darkness; Sulti, seated near me discreetly aside and busily knitting, would roll her eyes unbelievably, and I would realise that I was an infinitesimal atom sticking to the surface of a whirling globe a-spin for ever, like a Maulawi dervish in the sounding, empty reaches of Space.

And then the American would produce his banjo and bring us down to the jolly, solid earth again.

He played with spirit; for another blessing his repertoire was not unduly classical. After corking up Papa, who can't sing and will sing, with one of the special cigars I treasured for the purpose, we would make our archæological surroundings melodious with the "Cruisekeen Laun," "The Flowers that Bloom in the Spring," "Sally in our Alley," and similar favourites, while the workers stopped their own noises to listen. Not that they liked Western music, but they thought we were at our orisons, and it is only manners to let people who pay you well say their prayers in peace. And the jackals and hyænas on night-duty in the graveyard would contribute an occasional antiphonic howl, until in time would come the dewfall to dissolve the assembly.

Chapter X

A SHARED SECRET

IN due course Chefket Bey arrived, and with him a force of zaptieh so imposing that we felt quite secure against the scourge of the country-side—roaming bands of desperate sneak thieves.

The worst drawback, altogether, was that Piers was so perpetually busy over improving Evelyn's mind in his spare hours, and hours filched from business, that the work both did was a negligible quantity. I had not the heart to spoil their good time, and the consequence was that Mr. Wilbur and I had to get through four people's share of clerical work. And two people can only do the work of four by mutual forbearance and arrangement.

It was trying, and, as Papa was under the impression that I was glad to have a contemporary in attendance, only one person was available to whom I could confide my real sentiments.

"What, thou hatest the man, my Rathia Khatoun?" said she. "Why?" Here she peered at me offensively. "An intruder, sayest thou? But the others like him, and when before have I known thee take sufficient interest in a man to dislike him actively?"

"I have hated men before, and that thou knowest, Sulti."

"For definite reasons. Particularly if they were discourteous to servants or the poor, or abused children

or animals. Ever those were the chief reasons for thy hatings. Now this Wilbur Effen' is the son of an owner of slaves, he owned slaves in his own youth, he knoweth how to treat all becomingly. And does he not endure that Eblis-begotten Semiramis with patience? As to children, thou knowest that we would never have got the date-stone out of little Suttum's throat yesterday if Wilbur Effen' had not kept the child amused with the wheels of his watch." Here she switched off at a tangent: "My Rathia Khatoun, why didst thou not tell us fully of Bitfa?"

"Why, Sulti, am I so fond of endless talk?" I hedged.

"Thou toldest us fully of Mouschat and Kalmaru."

"Because Evelyn was there. Besides, I was too upset at Bitfa to care to discuss it."

"Mar Geework! Then Wilbur Effen' was present on the one occasion in thy life in which thou wast discountenanced," she replied.

There was no help, only innuendo, to be got from Sulti.

The morning of our departure came. A little rain had fallen, and Papa had decided to go back with us to Mosul for the wet season, while Piers and the American were to stop and keep the diggings on, in a modest way, until our return in spring. A piece of work had to be done, work for experts, before we went, and long before *Breath of Morn* we all turned out.

The last stars were still shining overhead in the grey rawness when we assembled outside the enclosure, all of us muffled to the eyes, Miksi laden with tapes and pegs, and the old Bey in attendance because he liked early hours and to see other people at work. We were to trace the walls of the Ziggurat enclosure, and the hour was one of our tools. In the early morning the tops of buried walls, indistinguishable otherwise from

the ground, collect so much dew that they show as gigantic snail-tracks.

We had scarcely assembled when the desolate silence of morning was broken by a loud and increasing clamour from the servants' quarters, and a scared messenger ran up. A pickman had arranged to keep back a cylinder for a Baghdad curio agent who was foxing round; the transaction had just been discovered by loyal workers, and it would take Papa, Miksi, and Piers to save the lives of the culprits.

Papa said "Dear me!" in a tone that made it sound very wicked. "Rathia, you'll kindly help Wilbur to do the tracing," he ordered, over a shoulder, as he pelted off.

So we went, four of us, down the slope. The Tel was dreary in the silence accentuated by echoes from the seat of disturbance. We could look round at the country stretching, blank and eerie, to the skyline, where the vague beginnings of sky floated in a sea of mistiness to arch overhead in a clearer grey with the paling moon and a few stars in it. Below us was the hummocky pile of the Tel, nearest the slope with the cemetery on it, the stones only marked by their shadows. There was no breeze, but the trees made a crisp little noise among their branches, as though they shivered in the raw chill.

"Thus it was we did the guard rounds at Plevna," said the Bey, impressed. "Khatoun Effen', are we bound for the graves?"

"Verily, Effen', look how the lines run."

The buried wall-tops were very distinct to whoso knew what they were, shimmering almost from our feet into the haziness where the tombs were. They glistened in broken interlacing rectangles, interrupted here and there where blown earth was right over them. The American stamped in a peg and I paced the outcrmost

line, paying out tape as I proceeded. "We might as well do something until my father comes," I remarked.

"It is written on the forehead," murmured the Bey. The old Plevna hero was horribly afraid of a graveyard in anything but full daylight; but he dare not show the white feather before Giaours. So the three followed behind me. At the first of the outlying tombs I stopped instinctively until he came up and pronounced, with hand lifted in salutation, the Greeting of the Grave:

"Peace be with ye, O Dwellers in the Graves! May Allah have mercy on us and ye! Ye have gone before, we are travelling after!"

"Amen," said I shamelessly. Evelyn and the American looked respectfully awkward, as Occidentals always do at a suggestion of mixed religions. I went on, skirting tombs and climbing mounds as the glistening line led.

"Fifty-six paces," said Mr. Wilbur when we reached a crossway. He put it in a note-book, stamped in a peg, and glanced at me.

"Ruling Passion's going strong," he observed. "I believe, Miss Jerningham, you say that Greeting whenever you spy a tomb, but you don't kick, do you, when the sacred call of Assyriology demands the grubbing up of a graveyard?"

"If we excavate under such circumstances we tunnel under interment level, as you ought to know," I replied, mounting an eminence to get a good view of the field of operations.

"Oh, I know now, something," he agreed.

The dew was still making a ground mist. Behind us Evelyn and the old Bey had stopped. The old man was discoursing eagerly, the girl listening with deep interest. The words: "And so Osman Effen' bade us——" came to me, and I knew he was fighting his battles over again, and she was gathering material for her diary. Up

against the paling sky the dew decked their heads with opalescent haloes. I looked back at the American, and caught his gaze fixed on me. He dropped his eyes guiltily, and I reddened. He had no business to be considering how I looked with a halo on.

"We will try that line farther out," I ordered. "The dew will be up soon."

We scrambled over an intervening knoll, and started along a very broad track. It led through the thickest packed part of the burial-ground, the glisten of it broken in parts by tombstones. I went first, and Mr. Wilbur followed silently, stamping in pegs when the line required them. When I stopped to look Evelyn and the Bey were sitting on two stones, deep in conversation. A little farther on we reached the brim of a ravine that cut across the wall-track. To the right the side of the incline was plain earth, to the left the edge glistened in parts. At my feet a buttress-like projection went straight down to the bottom of the hollow.

"I'm much mistaken if we have not located an angle of the girding wall," I pronounced. "Don't you see? It turns to the left to encircle the Ziggurat mound. Look at those glistening places in the hollow, bits of the outer coating of burnt brick."

"Then it's probable the foundation cylinders are down there? Won't Sir Horne be pleased? Shall we get down and prospect, Miss Jerningham?"

If Mr. Wilbur expected to lend me a helping hand he was mistaken. I was in the ravine before he had decided where to descend. "I don't believe any one could find this except by following the dew-trail," he declared, as we inspected the ground. "I say, isn't there rather a lot of tombs about here?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "That's my father's affair."

"What a double personality you are!" he observed.

“Miss Jerningham amongst the sick and dying simply has no connection with Miss Jerningham out after finds. I suppose it is because you are half Eastern and half Western.”

“You appear to expend a great deal of thinking on my genealogy,” I retorted, rather astounded at his impudent daring.

“Yes, I’ve discovered that the combination is excellent. If you were an ordinary person it would take two distinct people to do what you manage. It’s very convenient all round, Miss Jerningham.”

I looked up sharply, and read the real meaning in his eyes. An apology for the Rue de Pera. He knew I read it, too. That I could also see.

“I’ve learnt to understand this,” he proceeded. “Indeed, I’ve learnt a lot since I came to the East, Miss Jerningham. Don’t you believe I have?”

I did. And he knew I did. If it had only been a matter of the Rue de Pera I could have laughed and assented. For a moment I was ready to do it. Then I remembered the wood of Sliwa Klissia.

“You have not learnt to refrain from conversation in the middle of work,” I returned, and proceeded to inspect the buttress. Loose stones composed it, and loose soil heaped against it by the S.E. wind. Down this I had run, and the light stuff, disturbed by my heels, was trickling down.

“Hullo, I do believe there’s something there!” said Mr. Wilbur.

“Not cylinders,” I amended. “The wall must go deeper. That’s only loose stones tumbled from the top.”

One does not often find treasures at the surface; still, it is advisable to be prudent. Mr. Wilbur set to work, raking away the light soil and pulling aside broken pieces of limestone. “Gold!” he exclaimed, as a glint

of the red metal glowed in the soil against the bank. It was the undark darkest hour before dawn, but light was beginning to split greyly along the eastern verge, and our trained eyes could see well enough. Mr. Wilbur's clasp knife caught something; he hooked in his fingers, pulled, and brought away something large and flapping, while a cascade of soil was swept aside as he jerked his arm, and the hidden was revealed.

"Don't look, Miss Haroun!" he shouted, horror-stricken and too shocked to remember for the moment that I was much more hardened than he. What he had pulled away was the fringing remnant of a cloak, an Arab woman's sebleh, and at our feet, amid a mere powdering of soil, lay a skeleton, face down. The gold we had seen was part of a diadem of coins that hung round the skull.

"I—I've disturbed a grave," Mr. Wilbur faltered.

"No," I hastened to reassure him.

"A crime?" he hinted.

"Perhaps." I was regarding the find thoughtfully.

"If so it is strange. She is stretched out quite peacefully, you see, her hands under her face."

"A woman?" his voice dropped. He was not yet used to the death and decay bolted land of the Two Great Rivers.

I took the knife and made more investigations. "Years ago," I decreed, "and no crime. Don't you see this line of stones?"

I indicated a little rectangle of pebbles set neatly end to end. "That's the way Arabs mark a grave, you know," I added.

"It's only two feet long," he objected.

"A child's," I returned. "It's easy to understand now, is it not? A woman dead with her head on a child's grave and her face in her hands. No crime here."

The American snatched off his hat. "I'm a coarse

fool!" he exclaimed, "I begin to see. She killed herself."

"Eastern women rarely commit suicide," I proceeded. "They do not need to do so as a rule."

"Oh Lord!" said the American, and his face was white and pitying. "Women are the same everywhere. My own mother died a week after my father, and for no reason the doctors could describe."

We stood for a little while looking down silently at the poor symbols of tragedy. "What's to be done?" asked Mr. Wilbur, his tone reverently hushed. "Shall we call some of the men?"

"Stones fell down to keep her from the jackals," I replied. "I don't like to be harder than the stones."

"You forget, Miss Haroun. Allah made them fall."

"Of course. I never thought I could forget that there's no such thing as a fortuitous combination of circumstance."

"We all do, and say, things foreign to our real nature at times," he replied softly.

"Well, I cannot do this."

"No more can I." He knelt, but hesitated.

"Miss Haroun, it is not that I am afraid of such things——" he said, looking at me.

I knelt beside him. It did seem more fitting that another woman should handle the poor relics. Without needing orders Mr. Wilbur dug a hole within the line of stones. It was strange how we thought alike when absorbed by this piece of bitter real life. To finish we piled back the earth and knelt undecided.

"I suppose she was Moslem?" he hinted.

I raised my hands and repeated the Fatihah and the Greeting of the Grave. "Sit tibi terra levis," I concluded.

"Amen!" responded Mr. Wilbur heartily. He gave me a hand up and I forgot to disregard it.

We climbed up again to our pegs and tapes. Evelyn and her old escort were sauntering in search of us, not too hurriedly.

"The foundation cylinders will be there," I said, with a gesture. Then I wrenched the first peg out of the ground. A vigorous tug at the line brought out the next one. We walked to it, taking in the tape. By the time we had paced to the first peg day had broken and the sun leapt over the horizon with the electrifying suddenness he reserves for the East. Evelyn and the Bey were not far off; from the other side of the mound Papa and Piers were coming, tiny in the distance.

Before either party could reach us the sun's rays caught the mound and from all the soil there swirled up a thick, delicate haze. For a moment I stood with the American in a white mist that hid all the world but our two selves. Then the last of the dew gathered into an ephemeral, ethereal cloud, and dispersed itself in the warmed air. The ground was dry again, nothing served to distinguish buried walls from common earth.

Said Evelyn, when she reached us: "Have you two done no work? And your hands are filthy. I should keep an eye on you."

"There's nothing to be done in this part," I asserted.

"Nothing," Mr. Wilbur confirmed.

Here Papa reached us and put a query. "No use trying here, Sir Horne," the American volunteered, before I could speak.

Tel Abou Khatoun and my example had certainly corrupted his morals.

"That's my report, dad," I decreed, shamelessly trading on my reputation.

And that is why to this day that part of Tel Abou Khatoun has guarded its probable treasures undisturbed. Rathia of the Abbasside and Jerningham lines

decreed it was hopeless, and a new generation of Assyriologists will have to arise before her dictum is questioned.

"I see there's something stronger than Ruling Passion," the American whispered as he stood at Arjamand's head later in the morning. "My education is proceeding rapidly."

It was the way he looked at me that pointed the remark. His eyes began by being quizzical, and in a moment, holding mine, turned sombre with a hidden, fierce light at the back. "Miss Haroun," he said, his tone hard with the control he was keeping on his voice, "some day we are going to understand one another."

And all the way to Mosul annoyance was at the back of my mind over the reflection that I had been forced into the intimacy of a shared secret with the man who had reason to think thoughts about the wood of Sliwa Klissia.

BOOK IV

THE HARVESTING

Chapter I

THE NEW POLITE SPY

THE wet months at Mosul passed at lightning pace on the pinions of agreeable work. As fellow-creatures we pitied the Henriots, but as trade rivals the annihilation of the Louvre Expedition's first successes was the last drop in our cup of joy. Occasionally Papa rode to the Tel, sometimes one of the young men came to town; Mr. Wilbur to squire some unusually precious find, Piers more often on excuses that meant that, as long as he lingered, I had to sit up late and do Evelyn's share of the docketing and other work. We kept Christmas, all five of us, in a forty-eight hours' down-pour that was seasonable enough for the time in England. And on a changeable, sun- and - showery March day we took up residence again on the Ziggurat.

With the river in flood we shot El Awayi all standing, and came to the old landing-place within thirty hours. It rained all the way from Kalah Shergat; the banks were melting morasses, edged with slimy rottenness of dead weeds. The porous ground around the Tel was an undulating sea of brown moistness, the Tel all soppy in the hollows and damp at the heights. The water-course of my first entry was running chest-deep, and we made our state return under the charge of an Arab and Chaldæan guard of honour who all suffered from cold in the head, and could not honour us with the usual powder-play owing to the humidity of the powder. It is like that in the Orient sometimes.

"If this continues to-morrow, you girls go straight home," Papa announced gloomily.

But it was all big stars and a haloless moon that night, and dry next morning, and within a few days of our arrival the barren plain had become a sea of verdure with opal splashes of wild-flowers to foam the crests of it. One night it was bare, the next morning a thin mist of greenness had crept over it, in a few more days it was thick with grass and herbs, under burning sunshine by day and bracing frost at night. Flowers by the acre spread themselves over the erstwhile desert, too, so that the green was almost hidden in succession by enamelling of pale gold, white, and mauve, as crocus, arum-lily, and tulip followed one another. Spring is spring round about the Two Great Rivers.

One familiar figure was missing. Chefket had retired to a life of fresh activity. Turks on Government pensions do not rust; rather, the effort to extract two quarterly instalments per annum keeps them fresh to incredible ages. So we were glad for our old favourite, but apprehensive for ourselves.

A week after our arrival his successor came. On a cheery Tuesday afternoon sounds of some excitement reached us as we waited for the men at the mystic hour of five. "Our new Overlord has arrived, girls," announced Piers, coming up. "Rejoice, for he is quite good-looking."

"What do good looks matter when we'll all have to be good now?" sighed Harvey Wilbur, approaching from another part of the Tel. "You hear, Miss Evelyn? No more pocketing of winged bulls and slipper coffins on the sly—Why-y——"

Papa came up, ushering a smart figure in military undress. "Halet Bey, Rathia, my dear," Papa announced. "My eldest daughter, Miss Jerningham, Bey Effen'."

The new-comer bowed, unsurprised. I probably looked as astounded as Mr. Wilbur did as I recognised the prematurely portly person, stolid features, and outstanding ears of the Mutessariff of Bitfa.

"Allah hath permitted me the felicity of encountering Jerningham Effendina before," he said as he bowed. "And I perceive He hath guided my steps again into the path of Wilbur Effen'."

We went through the necessary explanations. "But this is a long way from Bitfa, Bey Effen'," I said when we were settled.

"Effen', I am no longer of Bitfa. It pleased our most gracious lord the Padishah, for the sake of his servant's health, to permit my removal from an inclement district to an agreeable one, and from a post of onerous honour to one less onerous and more honourable."

The meaning was, of course, that he had been turned out of his office, and degraded to the small and stagnant post of looking after us. A great fall for a Mutessariff. He had left Bitfa some time before, so could give little recent news from that district. "Only the Padishah hath decided against the Gadarwands in their dispute with Ischaryar of Kalmaru," he informed me. "They have had to pay compensation to Ischaryar for falling unlawfully and unprovoked on his band in the hills. As to the villages that were attacked near Kharlis, some of Ischaryar's men have been quartered there for their protection."

This was an exact parallel to putting a few wolves in a sheepfold to defend it from the pack outside the palings, still it was only what one would expect. Evelyn forestalled me at that point with an eager inquiry as to whether our informant knew how all was with the family of Ischaryar.

"Effen', when I left Bitfa all was well, by Allah's

grace, at Kalmaru, nor had death or sickness entered by the door of the most excellent Ischaryar Beg," he replied. This was as much as one Moslem could be expected to say of another Moslem's domestic affairs.

"Mar Geework, Rathia Khatoun! What doth this man here?" demanded Sulti, when I went in for my topi, presently.

"Halet Bey, Sulti? He is Chefket Bey's successor."

"Sent to spy on us after being a Mutessariff at the other end of the country? And he was of Bitfa when thou wast there!"

"Coincidences are odd, Sulti."

"Please Allah and Mart Maryam, I do not like coincidences, my Rathia Khatoun."

"Sulti, thou art foolish. It is but chance that he is here."

"Chance?" she repeated. "'Chance' is the biggest word in the world."

"He is a good man, and kind to Christians, by all accounts."

"A Turk who is kind to Christians while in office in the wilds—well, please God, when that mare of thine whinnies and would rub her nose on me I keep an eye on her hind-hoofs. That is all I have to report, Rathia Khatoun."

I was not disposed to notice her croakings, beyond being a little annoyed that she should entertain suspicions I did not share, for I knew her acumen in judging character as a rule, and prided myself on my own. All was forgotten soon, however, as we proceeded to show the Bey the mound.

Piers and Mr. Wilbur had returned to their work. That left four of us to descend from the aristocratic calm of the Ziggurat to the curse-boltered pandemonium that was toward, in a setting of dust clouds, all over the northerly heaps. It was getting on towards

knocking off time; one of the overseers had stuck a bamboo in the soil at a level spot, with a line scratched to East of it. When the cast shadow touched the line work would cease, the line was therefore the cynosure of all eyes and thoughts.

Dust was the keynote of everything. Dust, dust, and still more dust billowing round everything, saving the sea-green sky and the sombre upper peaks of the Tel, in clouds touched to rose at the edges by the setting sun. Certain caverns in the ground were the foci towards which strings of vociferating figures flew, with elf-locks tossing and baskets brandished frantically, and from which other files of equally frantic, half-clad creatures emerged with full baskets, trotting to empty them over the lip of a ravine and then join the other line.

Amidst it stood the overseers, calm in the storm, using their sticks at intervals, and taking down the names of those who were to claim the prospective reward for a find. The ravine was the general dumping place; it was nearly full of dust-clouds; little children with charmed lives were grubbing in the debris for stray finds overlooked at the fountain-head. As we passed they saluted us with the grey-beard gravity of oriental childhood.

The term Buried City raises in the mind an image of the Coliseum, Baalbec, Persepolis, at the worst Pompeii. Here dust and holes were the sole traces of bygone glory. We skirted the actual scene of present operations, to a part that had been sufficiently scooped out for the while, and Antiquity at last greeted us, to wit my own particular Kirabu smiling beside a cavern in a bank. The Kirabu passage was considered unsafe, so we climbed the bank and descended a flight of steps into a yawning pit. According to surrounding circumstances the excavations are either trenches open

to the sky, or tunnels ; these steps led to an open trench lined at either side, ear high, with slabs of alabaster. Some of the slabs were reduced to lime, and dribbled away at a touch, others too scorched to be distinguishable, a few fairly preserved covered with inscriptions or carved in low relief with gods and kings, battle scenes, or sacrificial processions.

At the far end, flanking a doorway, were two great slabs. On each of them Asshur Dan the King, tall as ourselves, offered a fir-cone and poured libations before the be-ribboned sacred maypole, while two bird-headed figures stood behind him approvingly. The doorway was guarded by two marble lions, which presented to us jaws snarling open wide enough to take in a man's head. We had to take tapers from a stock hidden near before entering that portal.

It led into a great hall. We had not fully excavated this, or any other apartment of the complex. It would take a short lifetime and a long fortune to do that. The plan is to drive a tunnel, some seven feet high and five wide, along the wall of each side, clearing out all doorways, and treating the other rooms into which they open in the same way. The place is therefore a warren of narrow, straight passages, stuffy in spite of occasional air shafts, lined on one side by a wall of brick, faced with marble slabs, plain or earven, on the other by the solid earth that fills the chambers and roofs all.

Some of the slabs were fairly intact, and the feeble light of our tapers glimmered fantastically on gods and kings in scorched relief, on battles and triumphal processions, on religious ceremonies, on squadrons sweeping forth in endless lines and captives marching in dragging double files. Asshur Dan had it all carved to the glory of his gods and the eternal memory of his own majesty seven-and-twenty centuries ago, that the whole earth might remember him for ever. Now we

think we have made out his name correctly, but will not be too certain about it.

Half-way along a wall we encountered Mr. Wilbur. He squatted under a taper and was sketching a tablet opposite, which was so rapidly crumbling that even the wind of our passing in the confined space set up a bigger trickle. When we had passed him I chanced to look back as I stopped to disengage my skirt from a bone that protruded from the earth-wall. He had paused in his work to look after us, and his eyes were following the Bey, his forehead puckered perplexedly. This quite upset my previous impression that whenever I could surprise his look it was always bestowed on me. An extraordinary annoyance was in my mind until it occurred to me that the ex-Mutessariff reminded him of Bitfa and Sliwa Klissia. I had actually almost forgotten that unspeakable incident in the past months. Mr. Wilbur's look was absent, as though half remembering something; it dawned on me that, perhaps, he had forgotten too, and the sight of Halet Bey had roused memory.

Evelyn, disengaging my dress, noticed my reddened cheeks and misconstrued the meaning. "Stuffy, isn't it, dear girl?" she observed. "And don't you feel as though you had been wandering here ever since your memory began?"

I did. It seemed as though many ages had dropped, like a curtain, between our meeting the American at his work and the happy time in which we had both forgotten Sliwa Klissia. We went on past rippling lines of gods and kings and captives, and came to another portal, guarded by the fringing stumps of what had been limestone bulls, and so out into free air again.

This was the eastern end of the Temple complex and the ravine that bounded it was at our feet. The sun was at dipping point, a canescent, quivering disk,

behind us; in front, the shadow of the Tel stretched, clear-cut, far over the plain. Beyond its verge the land rippled, gay with grass and flowers, to the greying eastern sky where the moon hung, colourless as yet. Along the ravine our sight, becoming adjusted to the shadow of the mound, discerned various curious appearances. A sulphurous odour also forced itself on our attention.

"Bitumen pits," said the Bey, and expressed a desire to view them nearer.

The way was a yard-wide goat-track along the ravine, twenty feet below the rim and fifty above the bottom, with a perpendicular slope sheer to the pools in the depths of the depression. They were big pools, four in number, many yards in extent, deep-set and sullen. The water was too bad even for Arab use, the earth around was fire-blackened, the margin of each rimmed by a growing circle of bitumen, sombre and glistening. The surface of the water was hidden by a viscid, yellow layer of naphtha, all over it great bubbles rose and burst at slow intervals, adding the sulphur to the characteristic pitchy reek, and sending out languid ripples accompanied by fragments of black scum that floated to attach themselves to the increasing rim.

Some one will make a fortune out of the naphtha-pits of the Two Rivers some day. We, like the rest of the indigenes, made use of ours as a cheap substitute for fireworks. A match dropped in after dark made a Brock's Benefit until the water was burnt clear, and in a few hours another accumulation would be ready for a fresh display. So prodigal is Nature round the Two Rivers.

Over the lower far bank of the ravine we could see the plain, dotted with black tents and reed-huts, running to the heights on the horizon. Along the ravine-rim some Arabs were driving a little flock homewards,

pretending to drive them from a reaving expedition; a line of camels lurched rhythmically between the lines of tents, a woman's figure to be faintly made out on the foremost, a man leading all on ass-back—as it might be Eleazar bringing home Rebekah to his master's tent. It was a double-sided view: the peaceful evening scene beyond the ravine, ourselves up in the sunset light, between, at our feet, the menacing pools down in the dark. "It seems to me this is an allegory," I observed. "There's a depth of darkness and horror in the fairest aspects of life."

"It seems to me that round darkness and horror the fairest aspect of life may lie," retorted Evelyn. Piers had deserted work to come and hold her hand while she craned over for a view.

We retraced our way, overground now, and reached the Temple mound as the shadow of the bamboo touched the line. As the blessed event came to pass overseer after overseer blew his whistle, the lines of workers ran together in wild confusion, for a few minutes pandemonium reigned, then came a sudden hush only accentuated by the pad of bare feet. In some wonderful way tools had been put in store, and the labourers were trooping off in orderly squadrons. The dust of their going settled as the sun dipped and shade came over the world. A change came over the erstwhile hectoring overseers.

"Salatu 'l Isha, my brethren," said the eldest, addressing the few workers who lingered. He drew three fingers over his turban and sandals, stuck his rod in the sand, and faced it. The others ranged behind him. They all contented themselves with the three-finger substitute for ablutions; they had grown so used to their burrowing amongst bones that they had ceased to regard it as polluting enough to require the full washings before prayer. The Bey, being newer to the

Tel, regarded himself as hopelessly polluted by his wanderings amidst the works of dead infidels, and merely passed his fingers over his ears as promise to attend to his vespers when he encountered a supply of water. So we slipped away quietly and left them bowing in unison to the muttered Arabic that none of them understood.

"I say, Miss Jerningham," said Harvey Wilbur, when he got me by myself that evening. "It's a far cry from Bitfa, as Mutessariff, to Tel Abou Khatoun as small-fry spy. Don't you think so?"

"Life is full of coincidences," I replied.

"I distrust coincidences." He rubbed his lean blue chin in a puzzled way. "The Governor of a big town—when you were there; now degraded to small spy—at the place where you are."

"Well, what of that?" I demanded, flushing.

"I don't know," he stuck to his guns doggedly. "But I had a kind of feeling when Sir Horne introduced him. You know the kind of feeling, Miss Jerningham. Intuition."

"You seem to imply that, for some occult reason, Halet Bey has been sent to spy on us"—I hoped my voice did not sound as angry as I felt—"for something that happened at Bitfa. Orientals are anything but fools as a rule; don't you think it would be a little tactless to send him after me? So obvious."

"Whoever set him on might think that the obviousness would draw the wool over your eyes," he proceeded.

"No Oriental would pay so poor a compliment to a woman's intelligence, I'm sure."

He pursed his lips dubiously. "I'm distrustful," he persisted.

"You have no reason for suspicion," I replied.

"Only instinct, and I tell you, Miss Jerningham, you can always put your money on Instinct when it's having

a quarrel with Reason. Instinct will wing its way on a bee-line to Truth, while Reason is side-tracking amongst the ground-trails."

"I agree with you to some extent, Mr. Wilbur. For instance, though I have no actual reasons for the supposition, instinct tells me I might be interested in your latest sketches if you'll be good enough to let me see them."

He lingered a minute, rubbing his chin. "Some day we will understand one another. Instinct tells me so," he said, and went for the sketch-book.

Chapter II

THE GUNS OF SLIWA KLISSIA

THE weeks went on: *Eskisi gibi*, as they say round about the Two Rivers. That is the unofficial motto of Turkey, and it means: "The same old way."

We would have found an archangel faulty if he had stepped into dear old Chefket's shoes, but Halet Bey proved as satisfactory as any mere mortal could under the circumstances. We found he was Constantinople born and bred, and he seemed to have shaped as decently as any one could after an upbringing in an atmosphere of officialdom hard by the Galata Bridge. He was conscientious in strict moderation over his duties, grateful for our claret and illustrated papers, and led the workers' prayers when he happened to be handy. So the spring went and summer came, scorching up vegetation, drying our private torrent, turning the trenches into bakeries and the tunnels into ovens, and at times nearly overwhelming everything but the highest peaks in sand-whirlwinds. It was not the pleasantest season of the year, but we were healthily situated out on the free plain, and it would have been worse in odoriferous Mosul or scorching Baghdad.

It was towards the end of May, on a cool evening after a broiling day, that my most tenderly nursed project came to full bud. The Bey and the American were in their own quarters, Piers and Evelyn were wandering at large, and Papa and I were peacefully

enjoying the evening breeze and trying to keep the winged legions of the dusk at bay with fans and cigarettes.

"Those children have been out in the sun all day," said Papa, blinking to where two little white dots were meandering down the Temple slope. "I don't know why they haven't been sunstruck yet," he grunted. "They should have been, ages ago, by all the rules of common sense."

"Please God, Effen', a fire does not get sunstruck," volunteered Sulti, who was passing.

"Hey? Why, Sulti, we were speaking of those foolish children, Evelyn Khatoun and Piers Effen'."

"And I presumed to reassure you, Effen'. Please God, those two will not be struck by the fiercest sunshaft just now. So hath He ordained."

"Why, Sulti, thou art mysterious. I suppose thy meaning is that the skulls of the young folk are thick. Yet a while ago thou spakest of fire, of a counter-fire to the sun's flames."

"Why, please God, Effen', there's a kind of fire that may be contained in a thick skull as well as a thin."

And she passed on, after bestowing on me a freemasonic look that said: "Lord, how dense the cleverest of males can be!" Papa opened his mouth for a remark, but closed it as the pair under discussion entered the enclosure and advanced to us. Piers was a nice bright brick-red, against which his eyes and moustache showed as hiati, Evelyn was a little pale under the inevitable tan, but calm. He showed a coy inclination to hang back, she kept hold of his sleeve with a thumb and finger, and turned a deaf ear to his whispers.

"Well, children," Papa beamed on them. "Are you tired of *solitude à deux*?"

Evelyn looked at Piers. Piers's tint changed to a light purple. "Not at all, Uncle," he gasped. "In

fact we've come to tell you—to ask——” he stuttered and gave it up. “You tell him, Evie.”

“It's your part,” she objected.

Piers stared at Papa as though he had never seen the dear man before, and was not certain if he understood English. Papa looked equally amazed. The situation needed clearing. I jumped up and kissed the happy pair.

“Congratulations, Piers!” I exclaimed. “You always had luck in everything but Assyriology. I've expected it for weeks, of course.”

“Am I to understand——” began Papa, in a dazed way. “A pair of babies——”

“Twenty-six and nineteen,” I replied. “Perfectly perfect, isn't it, dad? Why didn't you ask her before, Piers?”

“Because she has a beastly seven hundred a year attached to her,” the bridegroom-expectant suddenly became fluent.

“I can't detach it,” Evelyn explained. “However, I've promised to spend it all on frocks and the poor.”

“Honour bright, Evie,” he exhorted.

“Honour bright,” she agreed. “As sure as my name's Evelyn Jerningham.”

“At present,” he recovered and grinned.

“Good heavens!” said Papa. “May I ask how you propose to live? Sit down and elucidate, if you can.”

“We thought Piers could go on helping you, and when the Expedition closes down Mr. Wilbur has promised to get him the post of Field Director to the University of South Carolina's projected Babylonian Expedition,” said Evelyn; settling on his knee.

“I'd forgotten that,” Papa conceded.

“And in the meantime Piers is going to write a book.”

“Any fool can write a book, my dear, but it takes a clever person to get it published.”

"Oh, it will be published. It's going to be good, and every one who is any one will buy it to see what I have written."

"I thought it was to be Piers's work, child."

"Our joint production. All about life in Asiatic Turkey and Assyriology. You know it takes two people to write a book of travel, an old hand and a tyro."

"I begin to have a great respect for your joint artfulness. So you propose to publish an epoch-making volume, and to live on the royalties until the Carolina Expedition starts? And may I ask when you want the wedding to take place?"

"We haven't considered that at all. Some time. And you haven't given your consent yet."

"Well, I suppose it is all inevitable. Piers, my boy, there's nobody to whom I'd sooner entrust one of my little girls than to you."

"Thank you, Uncle." Piers, red no longer, spoke with dignity.

"However, Evie's young yet for such serious business. My consent is on one condition. Engagement, yes, but no marrying until the book is an accomplished thing."

"I've half suspected it at the back of my mind, Rathia," he confided to me later. "Still, this kind of thing always takes one unexpectedly at the last, I suppose. They have not really known one another long enough, but I am not going to be a wet blanket. We have an idea—haven't we, child?—of how long it takes to write a book. And if the engagement survives the jolts and jars of collaboration it deserves to stand. I knew twin brothers who were like one soul in two bodies until a week's attempt at a joint volume of Memoirs made them dead cuts."

Really, at times my father is almost diplomatic enough for a woman.

The book started next day. It was Sunday, and in the cool of the morning we had service, conducted in a trench by a Chaldæan priest.

The trench was that of the temple vestibule, the priest had his station by one of the snarling marble lions, with Asshur Dan and his priests and gods and holy maypole behind, and we sat, ragged diggers and prim Europeans, on pieces of stone, with the decaying sculptured glories around us. Nothing could be stranger than this was in its quiet way. Those shabby wielders of pick and shovel, sitting humbly where their forbears had strutted in silk of Ind and gold of Ophir, joining, when the Psalms came, in words that were hotly new from Jewish hearts and brains when the sculptures around us were new. And the American, with a brace of cock-headed deities snarling behind him, thinking, as I could see, of how the builders of this Temple had been dust two thousand years before ever his country was discovered by professors of the Faith which blossomed from that entrusted to little, persecuted Israel.

No doubt about it. Turn them into new languages as you will, torture them into commonplace rhyme if you like, criticise and belittle if you choose, still the Jewish Psalms are the strongest, clearest, evergreen link of the ages. You may understand this with your mind, but you cannot realise it with your heart unless you have heard the words of backsliding, broken, triumphant little Israel echoing amidst the bones of all-conquering Asshur.

In the afternoon the workers snored out of sight after a sheep-meal, and to us, as I kept Papa company under our few precious shade-trees, came Piers and Evelyn, loaded with fountain-pens, writing-blocks, and a gilt-edged volume I knew well by that time. "The great book?" said Papa. "What is the title?"

"We haven't decided," replied Evelyn seriously.

"We want something distinctive, something that will indicate its scope—Assyriology, you know, and personal experiences. Can you suggest anything?"

"Not in this temperature. Ask Rathia."

"Down amongst the Dead Men," I proposed, through a yawn. "That's where you'll be, Evelyn, if you work seven days a week. Do put those things away, for charity's sake, and loaf. It makes me tired to see you working. You appear to be in a hurry to get married, my dear."

"She isn't," Piers interposed disgustedly. "She's only interested in the book now."

"I wonder what you children will find to put in it," said Papa with languid interest.

"Extracts from my diary, helped out by Piers's experiences——"

Here we were interrupted by the approach, from different quarters, of the Bey in search of something to look at, and Mr. Wilbur with a sheaf of *Puck* and *Judge* to lend us. We adjusted the supply and demand, and had in common decency to invite them to share the shade. Halet looked with pitying astonishment at the writing paraphernalia, and expressed regret that the two literary characters were so overworked. They explained the project.

"You appear, Evelyn Effen', to have written a volume already," he commented, glancing at the diary.

She explained it. "Minutes of each day's living?" he said, in mild surprise. "What a great deal of labour! And to what end, if one may ask without offence?"

"When I return to England, Bey Effen', I hope to amuse my relatives with accounts of life in Turkey."

"Why, Effen', do you find something fit to interest the folk of far-off Frankistan every day?"

"Surely, Bey Effen', Turkey is a most fascinating land."

"Mas'allah ! But, Effen', have you truly the industry to write every evening ?"

"I have not missed a day since I began it."

"What industry ! And, since the book appears to be half filled, I gather you have kept it several weeks."

"Over a year, Effen'. My writing is small."

"Mas'allah !" he repeated again. "Your relatives in far-off Frankistan are to be envied, Effen'."

Then we returned to our occupations, the Bey inspecting the specimens of C. D. Gibson's earliest, best work with appreciation, the collaborators squabbling pianissimo until Semiramis turned up with a fresh slaughtered lizard and distracted their volatile attention. All was peaceful ; only, when I looked up from my own book the American, seated a little behind the Turk, was scanning Halet's features covertly, his own set into an even mask.

Three weeks after, another Sunday opened badly with the loss of the great diary. Evelyn took it hard ; she had consulted it before service, and, on returning from the trenches, could neither find it nor remember where she last left it. The afternoon was, therefore, spent by most of the household corps in searching the temple mound, and every one was reduced to a state of irritation.

"What a great trouble over that book, Effen' !" observed the Bey to me in mild wonder. "Surely if Allah wills, it will return in good time ; He is merciful and compassionate."

We were by ourselves on the top of the Ziggurat, the scene of Mehreb Beg's discomfiture. We had ascended it to view a great marvel, to wit, the arrival of the only cart in the district. For some days the men had been smoothing a long track riverwards, and along this the vehicle had made its triumphant progress amidst an excited, gun-firing escort. It was a Homeric

construction, with wheels made of sections of a tree and all else *en suite*, and was pulled by man-power for lack of beasts of draught. Some of the men had never seen anything on wheels in their lives, and to them it had the character of something slightly and pleasantly improper. When I recall its reception I understand why the first cyclist in Kurdistan was murdered on suspicion of being a warlock.

It had been borrowed for a great project we had on next day. When it was drawn up in the appointed place the howls and gun-firing of the men, and the overpowering zagharit of the women caused Papa to hold his ears. He was directing operations; even at our height the noise was bad enough.

"We are lucky to be here, Effen', where we can see without hearing too much," I said.

"Even so, Effen', and where we can be seen without being overheard likewise," he replied. His voice was low and gentle as he added: "You would like to have your sister's book back, Effen'."

This jumping from topic to topic was unlike him. Much puzzled, I replied: "The child is troubled; of course I would like it back."

"Effen'," his voice sank lower, "I believe you are not playing a part at present, that you do not realise, for the time, the great importance of that book of your sister's own written evidence. Think of it, Effen', complete evidence in her own writing."

It is sometimes hard to tell when an Oriental has been drugging, so I was not more than much amazed at this. "I do not understand——" I began.

"You will understand directly, please Allah, Effen'," he quite purred. "Perhaps you will comprehend at once when I say you shall have the book back—by Allah Al Aziz!—when you have told me what became of those guns at Sliwa Klissia."

Chapter III

THREATS

FOR a short pause I looked blankly at the Bey's placid features. When speech returned to me it brought a natural tendency to hedge.

"Sliwa Klissia?" I repeated. "What guns?"

He made a little gesture as though of appeal. "Effen', you know. Why try useless subterfuge? The guns and cartridges in the woman's coffin. I know, and you know. What need to deny? It will only cause needless conversation. I know about the guns, indeed, for I had them placed in the coffin."

I made no reply. "At the village of Mishlu," he went on. "And now I wish to know where they are, that my face may be whitened before our lord the Padishah. Come, Effen', you know that I know. Let us drop subterfuge. This is an excellent chance for the discussion. We are alone, visible to all for propriety's sake, inaudible to all for secrecy's sake. Will it please you to be seated on this bank? I will, by your permission, take this stone. Then will we speak in comfort."

I sat down mechanically. "Come, Effen'," he repeated, facing me. "Do not fear to commit yourself. I know all, saving where the guns went."

"Effen', you speak in riddles," I said at last. "Concerning certain arms, a coffin at Sliwa Klissia, and—odd combination!—my young sister's diary. May I ask for the connection?"

"Effen', in that book, written in your sister's hand, is all the evidence necessary to connect you and your family with that that will blacken your faces before all Roum and Frankistan. And all this you know."

A mazing, nebulous wonder as to what incriminating folly Evelyn might have been guilty of filled my mind. It probably found expression in my face.

"You know, Effen'," the Bey reiterated. "Why did you go to Kalmaru? It is plain from your sister's words that the face of your family will be blackened thereby——"

"Bey Effen', these are idle threats," I replied. "If any purpose took us to Kalmaru, how could it disgrace us?"

"Effen', you lie boldly. You know that if the truth of your going to Kalmaru were spread abroad it would be the eternal disgrace of you, and of your family, both in the eyes of Moslems and Feringhis. If I told it in Stamboul through my agents, as I could do, would the Effendim of the Embassies keep it to themselves? It would be too tempting to the tongue."

My subconscious brain had worked fiercely during my silence. Now it passed to the conscious half that had listened to the Bey's words the conclusion all set in order. I laughed. "I was taken by surprise," I said. "Now all is clear to me. So I am to have back my sister's diary if I will tell what happened to the arms at Sliwa Klissia—granting I know?"

"Effen', you know. You know, and so does the Effendi from Yenghi Dunia, your lover."

He had touched the raw. "You lie!" I retorted. "The Effendi Wilbur is not my lover."

"You lie, and lie feebly, Effen'," he retorted. "All Tel Abou Khatoun knows it. And what shame? The diggers in the trenches and the Bedawin in the plains say: 'Greatly honoured will be Wilbur Effen' when he

leadeth to his tent the Kizil Khatoun, the favourite daughter of Jerningham Pasha.' But, Effen', I apologise. I did not mean to offend you, for I respect your wit and resource, and would the rather be your friend than your opponent. Stafar'llah! I have sinned against decency, in outraging your maidenly modesty."

I leant forward and lowered my voice. "Bey Effen', you profess yourself a little afraid of me. It is well; you know of my double breed likewise, as all Roum does. Let me tell you that you have hitherto had to do with Miss Jerningham the Englishwoman; if ever you couple my name with that of Wilbur Effendi you will have to do with Rathia of the Abbasside line."

"The daughter of the Khan Rathia of Amadiyeh? You have admitted it, Effen'. You are very cool."

He said it in a tone of grudging admiration.

"Let us return whence we started, to my sister's book and those arms. If I tell of the guns what will happen?"

"Effen', I will be restored to favour in the eyes of the Padishah. I may be a Vali yet, always your friend."

"And will there be a mortality amongst the Chaldæans of Kurdistan?" I asked.

"Would it be so ill for them to escape further life in their inhospitable land, Effen'?" he demanded it sanctimoniously.

"The breath of life is sweet, even in Chaldæan nostrils, and with the shadow of the Turk and Kurd ever mixed with it."

"It is Allah's will. I am grieved. By Him, the Exalted, I am grieved. But I must live, and if others die that I may live—why, is not all written on the forehead on the third day of life by the Finger of Allah?"

"Allah's Finger wrote a fine store of hypocrisy on thine, Bey Effen'," I retorted. "And is it not written that a hypocrite shall be the first to rise on the Day

of the Resurrection to Doom? I think I can reconstruct the happenings of the last summer and autumn round about the Mutessarifflik of Bitfa. Shall I set them forth?"

"It might simplify the understanding between us, Effen'."

"There was one Halet Bey, Mutessariff of Bitfa. He protected Christians because it was good for the revenue: For that he had a good name with the Consuls in Kurdistan. Now, lately, the Ottoman authorities have believed, or affected to believe, that Armenians have been arming for a rebellion. Therefore all native Christians have had an ill time. And the Consuls have made reports about it, and their Governments cause the Ambassadors to make the life of the Padishah a burden. I have read of the search for arms in Erzeroum Cathedral; probably it was that which caused Halet Bey to think how he would do a great service to the Padishah, and gain a Vilayet. He would trade on his reputation as a protector of Christians. He privately informed his superiors that he knew the Chaldæans were arming, much as he disliked to think it. They told him to be secret and vigilant, and his name was carried as far as Yildiz Kiosk. 'I will do nothing until I can arrange for some Feringhi to accompany my searchers,' said Halet Bey. 'Then he will be compelled to bear witness as to the finding of arms, the face of the Padishah will be whitened before the Ambassadors when they realise the bellicose nature of the Christians. The character of the Mutessariff who wishes well to Christians will make the exposure the more emphatic.'

"And, to emphasise it the more, he selected a Bimbashi for the search who was just and kindly, and famed therefor. It was a neat plot, and its success should have earned a Vilayet for Halet Bey. And when the finding of arms was known undoubtedly the Kurds

of the district and the *canaille* of Bitfa would, in fear or for plunder, have slaughtered innumerable Christians. But what would Halet have cared for that ? ”

“ Effen’, you misjudge. It would have depleted the revenue,” he interrupted with cynical gentleness.

“ Halet would have had his Vilayet by then. A fine plot, only—the arms vanished. And so angry was the Padishah over Halet’s deceit or bungling that he was degraded.”

“ You know all, Effen’.”

“ Except how you came here. Do others know of your suspicion of me ? ”

“ That, Effen’, is my secret.”

“ So. Listen carefully, Halet Bey. Of what use would any information from me about the guns be ? You must have authoritative testimony, mine. If I give it we will get into trouble, and what use then will it be to me that I have told ? ”

“ Effen’, you will get your sister’s book back. Likewise, Effen’, ye will get no harm from helping me. A confession that a brave and reckless Christian Englishwoman helped certain of her fellow-believers to escape the consequence of their plots. What then ? The Padishah may order your banishment, but how will that harm you ? All Frankistan is open to you. The Padishah will be able to show your confession as proof of an abortive rising, I will be restored to favour, and your friend. Your signed evidence will be better than the original plan.”

“ And the Chaldæans will be persecuted by the Moslem *canaille* when this becomes public ? ”

“ We cannot help that, Effen’.”

“ You know I was in the woods by Sliwa Klissia on that night. Doubtless you have searched them, and you cannot find how I spirited away the arms. Could you find nothing from the villagers ? ”

"No, they are so hardened to beatings that we could get none to admit any knowledge of the affair, for we dread to beat too much in that particular district, as the Consul has kept close watch on it since our plan was turned against us. We dug up the coffin, but the Bimbashi was sure the body was that he saw in it in the church."

"Effen', you wish me to give you a signed confession of how the guns were disposed of?"

"Verily, Effen'."

I laughed outright. "And it will become known to all the diplomats of Stamboul? And such things will leak out. That I helped Chaldæans——"

"It is rather to your credit, Effen'."

"—And then repented and betrayed them? It is a poor bargain!"

"A worse for you if I tell the truth of Kalmaru," he replied. "You know, Effen', how tales spread. I can circulate this at Stamboul, and the Franks of Pera will snatch it with avidity. As to Mosul and Baghdad, it will be a thing to make the ears itch. So will I do, Allah willing. Remember, your sister is the daughter of a great lady, granddaughter of a great Pasha of Frankistan, and the rank of them will make them plainer target for shafts of scandal."

Certainly, I reflected, the man could make out an ugly case if he could get it believed that I had simply turned Ischaryar on the helpless Gadarwand villages. And I could not tell the truth without compromising the Khanoum Effen'. What had Evelyn put in the diary? If the Bey was not bluffing it must be something very plain. No scandals spread so rapidly as those fathered by the Diplomatic Service, hedged in, as it is, by spies and intrigues. They run from Embassy to Embassy, from capital to capital, and filter quickly into common gossip. And it would appear that Evelyn

had been an accessory. My forehead grew damp as I thought it over. Every decent European in Turkey would be against us. As to Europe—we were most unfortunately conspicuous, with Papa's new title, and the kudos that had attended the news of our romantic success at Tel Abou Khatoun. Even Kalmaru would not be strange in the ears of cultured people, for I had made no secret of how and where and through whose good offices I had secured the Hittite signets which had made almost as much sensation as the Tel. The early 'nineties were a glorious epoch, but no more self-denying in the matter of racy scandal than any other period. My imagination culminated its horror-struck flight in a vision of possible French brochures, with real names in them. Heaven knew what an erection the bad enough foundation would support in time.

I flatter myself I kept a composed face and showed no more than an expression of deep reflection as these thoughts raced through my mind. "One thing is not clear, Bey Effen'," I said at last. "How came you to fix this suspicion on me? Simply because I was at Sliwa Klissia on the night in question?"

"Effen', my name is Halet. Halet Bey now."

"Well?"

"Twenty years ago it was Halet simply, and was the name of a lad who conducted the lady now known as the Khanoum Effen' of Kalmaru to the Diz Kalmaru."

"Oh. And you are a visitor there sometimes?"

"Even so. The Khanoum Effen' has been mindful of the lad who served her."

"All is plain now, then."

"All, save where the guns went, Effen'. But indeed, I have taken you by surprise. Take a little time before you answer. The counsel of the night-hours will bring wholesome reflections. Inshallah, to-morrow and its to-morrow you can reflect. In the morning I go on busi-

ness to Kirkuk. It is your Monday. On the Wednesday I return ; on the Wednesday, then, you shall tell me your decision."

"Very well," I assented. "What of my sister's book?"

He grinned. "It is in exceedingly safe custody. Nor dare you seek to have it stolen lest your interest in it appears a little suspicious. Doubtless you can ask your sister what she wrote about Kalmaru. You can also consult Wilbur Effen' if you like."

"Wilbur Effen' has nothing to do with it!" I retorted hotly.

"You say, Effen'," he returned gently. "If he were your lover, as men say, I could ascribe your heat to a desire to keep him out of a dangerous matter; as you deny the fact, I wonder why you are so angry about it."

"He had nothing to do with it."

"He was with you at Bitfa, and he is with you here. You talk together a great deal; he glares at me in a foolish way when I talk to you. Were he your lover I could understand it. As you deny it, when there is no need for shame about the matter, I begin to have suspicions. We will see on Wednesday, please Allah."

He paused, as though struck by an idea. "On Wednesday I will bring you this, a copy of the more incriminating parts of your sister's book, Inshallah. Why, Effen'" —his voice changed to an everyday tone— "how long we have stayed here! There is your sister signalling from your tents. Shall we join her before she sends the terrible little dog to rouse us?"

Chapter IV

BLUFF ?—OR WHAT ?

AFTER a great shock or surprise which you have to keep to yourself there ensues a period, of hours or days, that is nebulous to your after-recollection. Looking back through memory you remember the shock, and the later phase when you realised it was true and not a dream, but the span between, while all your conscious faculties were concentrated on the task of keeping up outward appearances, is a vague blank.

My first distinct recollection after the Bey had turned me over to Evelyn dates from after dinner. "Bless me, Rathia, you look seedy," observed Papa. "I hope you are not going to be ill, before to-morrow's work is done."

"When I recover my diary I'll put that fatherly remark in," commented Evelyn, *sotto voce*.

"You appear to put any amount of personalities into that book," I returned. "I hope you have not put in anything you would not like all the world to read."

"Who would read it?" she replied. "Barring the Bey, there's nobody on the mound but ourselves capable of reading English, and with us it would be all in the family—eh, you people?"

"Of course," the American confirmed heartily. "We are all one happy family—Tel Abou Khatoun & Co."

"As to the Bey," said Piers innocently, "he never reads even print if he can avoid it; so he's innocuous."

"I think you are too familiar with Mr. Wilbur," I complained, when I was alone with Evelyn, later.

"I've adopted him," she returned airily. "He felt so lonely, thousands of miles from home, and he has no near relatives, nothing closer than a cousin, so I've agreed to be a sister to him. He said that was just what he wanted."

The innocent remark caught my attention in a way it would not have done but for the Bey's insinuations. Beyond the stunning effect of the surprise and the strain to appear natural I had been nervously observant during the last few hours of the demeanour of every one. Were people linking my name with Harvey Wilbur's? It was impossible; yet what had put it into the Bey's head?

I was beginning to suspect that there was something more than I could fathom at the back of the Turk's threats. Well grounded as they were on the whole, there was something missing, some clinching circumstance that would weld his power over me into an irresistible weapon. And until I learnt what that was I could not counter-plan against him.

We had wandered to the top of the Ziggurat to look at the sleeping country sloping to the horizon and the far-away glint of river. Big and vague it lay, dusky in the starlight, dotted with little black smears that stood each for a home where some poor man harboured those who loved and depended on him. Tiny points of light flickered and winked, thickly round the Tel, and sporadically as far as eye could see. Evelyn lapsed into silence, gazing dreamily over the quiet view, unspeakably lovely, herself, with vagrant curls creeping from the scarf that draped her proud little head, lashes flickering golden over the smoulder of blue they shaded, and the whole gold and ivory and rose of her set up in harmony against the starry sky. A little undertone,

mellowed by distance, of shrill Arab songs, drifted to our ears, the crackling bark of a jackal roused us both.

"How could we endure a Western town again, Rathia?" said Evelyn. Her sweet voice was hushed, it had taken on a gentler, tenderer cadence of late. No doubt of it, her intercourse with Piers might take the outward form of jokes and bickering, but for all that she had found it possible to grow just a little more beautiful of late, to mellow suddenly, to develop the last little indefinable trait that made me now, in the starlight, think for a moment that it was her own mother come to earth again and talking with me as she used to talk.

"It is strange to think, is it not, that all those little people are more or less dependent on us?" she went on, softly. "I like to think some are a little better off and happier for us, Rathia."

"If we met a catastrophe, plenty of poor homes would be the poorer, many family fires die out, many sick live in torment for lack of aid, many children grow up lame or blind, more people, mostly mothers and wives and elder sisters, starve to death when Famine is in the land," I returned. "Yes, Evelyn, if we fell there would be a little less sunshine around the Rivers for a while. And that, my dear, brings me to something. I am much worried about your Diary. Heaven alone can tell where information will wander in the East——"

"I know," she interrupted earnestly. "You have warned me before, and I can assure you there is nothing in it all the world might not read, and welcome."

"Kalmaru for one thing," I said. "You know that was a risky business."

"Yes, and I remember the general tenor of what I wrote there. There was absolutely nothing but chat about our entertainers—their looks and ways, and how kind they were to us."

"Are you sure?"

“Positive. I read it over not so long ago. No mention of tribal affairs, of course, and nothing about the tunnel.”

She looked at me squarely. Her face was in shadow as she turned to me, but I could see the clear glow of her eyes. I turned my own gaze away, for I did not want her to read the anxiety I could not conceal, and questioned her closely. It was fruitless; she could recollect no single indiscretion, and she had a good memory for that, the most striking episode of her life.

No doubt about it, there was some hidden meaning in the Bey's threats, something I could not guess at, something that might descend on us like lightning out of the blue. I was helpless to meet the problem by any exercise of wit or knowledge, any sacrifice of self; it could only be turned aside by the unspeakable way of revealing the secret of the guns—betraying the Chaldæans of Bitfa district to open persecution, while putting us in a false light before the Ambassadors at Stamboul to boot. That was the first white night I ever spent through fear and helplessness.

Chapter V

THE CARTING OF THE CHERUB

MORNING brought a temporary answer: recklessness. A Double Rivers' morning, remember, in summer, with the undark night dissolving into a sun that came forth from his tabernacle ready to run to the end of the heavens and to leave nothing hidden from his light, with dew burnt up in a minute of haze, with a gracious breeze sent from off river by special providence. A morning with a little green verdure left, a morning with all the Tel awake and abroad and scaring the jackals from the cemetery by Wolf and Sheep Time. A morning that brought the reflection that after all it was but Monday, the blow was not due to fall until Wednesday, that there were two days for action or an Act of Allah, that the world may come to an end at any ungiven moment, that work was to be done though the heavens fell, and it had better be done cheerfully.

So I tried to tackle the day cheerfully, and of all the encampment only Sulti wanted to know why I had the fidgets in my hands, and Mr. Wilbur had the effrontery to suggest that the dirty-finger marks under my eyes were due to worry over the coming work.

People were coming in from the middle of the night on. Jebours from their reed riverside booths, Shammar cavaliers from the tented plains beyond Samarra; Khatounabad turned out *en masse*, and so did every village within ten miles. Dervishes, dirty and impudent

or trim and dreamy, Mollahs and Christian priests, Yezidis, Lazès, Armenians, Turks, and Greeks came by twos and threes. Schoolmasters of Tekrit made it a whole holiday that their pupils might improve their young minds and they themselves might see the fun. In short, it resolved itself into an impromptu fair, and I do not doubt that year now figures in Mesopotamian annals as the Year of the Carting of the Cherub.

To explain. The Cherub, my man-headed lion, the find that had secured us the Tel, was undoubtedly the largest, finest, and best-preserved one that excavation had unearthed since the Kouyunjik and Khorsabad first harvest. Our Fund could not afford to ship it to England, even if it could have bought it from the Stamboul Museum, and the Stamboul Museum could not afford to transport it to Stamboul. It looked as though we would have to bury it again and risk the natives digging it up and smashing it for building-stones.

We were lamenting the pity of it when Mr. Wilbur stepped into the breach. After a fabulous amount of wiring and cabling his University made an offer. Forty thousand dollars if we could get the Cherub to Basrah. There an agent would tranship it to America, the first and only Assyrian Genie in the New World. The sum was ample to buy it from the Stamboul Museum and to get it to Basrah—if only we could get it to the Tigris at all. Hence the cart.

For days men had laboured, hired with the Carolinian dollars, to smooth a sort of road to the river, three miles direct. Now the question was if we could get the Cherub into the cart unbroken. In the first daylight we sallied forth to stir into activity the devices put together by long toil and planning.

I will not detail the breathless Saga of the first few hours. We did it; that is all in a nutshell. Five hundred men worked with hawsers, screws, and poles, and

about five thousand souls made a watching sea of humanity, kept back by our zaptiehs under the Onbashi, who was Halet's *locum tenens*. At a critical moment, when the sculpture hung at an acute angle from the bank, a rope broke.

Down came the Cherub with an appalling thud. We all died a hundred deaths from despair during the moment's epic hush before Miksi leapt on the fallen idol, ascertained that it was uncracked, and announced the fact in a Tiyari slogan that sent every one mad and into a frenzy of gun-firing, war-yells, and howling. Taking advantage of the excitement, Papa and Harvey Wilbur set the frenzied workers to getting the marble, by way of greased planks and lines of rollers, down the slope and along the watercourse track to the beginning of the new road where the cart waited. Amidst invocations to Moslem and Christian saints it was hauled, levered, and pushed up an incline, and slid on to the vehicle.

Then the crowd swept the police aside and pranced and sang around the accomplished work, a frantic maelstrom of humanity, and Harvey Wilbur produced his camera and immortalised the scene, with the Cherub's face resting on one cheek on its tarpaulin pads and smiling serenely amid the clamouring crowd like some descended demi-god of imperturbable, wise calm. Idolatry is hard to avoid; one cannot help a sneaking belief that these giant gods and helpers of old, that have stridden across the ages to give their message to whosoever will hear, are not mere stone.

"Whiles I wonder if a soul were gi'en them wi' the blows."

All this done, we said "Alhamdu'l'llah!" and went to breakfast. The sun was cruelly up, and the touchy part of the work was done; remained the long, dull pull to the river. The first mile was accomplished with comparative ease; it was fairly flat, the workers were

fresh, and the cart was a glossy novelty. Two hundred men dragged at a time at the five hawsers attached to it, and as they hauled they sang impromptus in its honour, assisted by their friends, relatives, and the sightseers, and led by an overseer who sat on the Cherub's face and gave the time.

It was a wonderful cart, so they sang; verily it was the grandfather of all carts. Its parents, by grace of Allah the Creator, were Wit and Industry, and its children were piastres and prosperity to all who wrought in its shadow. And much more to the same effect, each canto preluded by "Y'Allah!" and followed by the refrain: "Matches in his beard who contradicts us!"

The next half-mile brought a different tune. Novelty is of all emotions the most evanescent, and now they saw that cart in its true colours.

It was a burnt-fathered beast of a cart; so the altered strain ran. Its father was a dog, and its mother never boasted a nose from her birth up. Matches in his beard who contradicted them! Its children were broken backs and galled hands. It ought to be—and matches in his beard who contradicted them!—in the Bad Place, assisting at the torment of the worst of Kafirs——

Here they passed translation, and the cart stuck in a soft spot. The road was going up an incline, every one struck and declared it was impossible to budge it. Something had to be done. The men had been hauling promiscuously so far; now we divided them into religions. Two hundred Chaldæans pulled first, while the Muhammadans jeered, and under fire of it they got the vehicle to the brow of the rise. There it livened the proceedings by running away in a ponderous manner back to its old resting-place. Almost the Chaldæans wept. Again they bent to it; they got it well over the brim this time, and it varied matters by running away down in front. We felt our hair turning grey during

the ghastly minutes that elapsed before it became known that supernal agility on the part of the men at the ropes had baulked its desire to fill the rôle of Jugger-naut. The one casualty was Miksi Gauriel. He had been standing on the Cherub's cheek, chanting the time for the pulls altogether, was somersaulted off backwards, and had to be comforted and fanned for the rest of the day. It was Mr. Wilbur who thought of the admirable plan of putting an Arab in his place, and under the caustic tongue of the Ishmaelite the Christians got it in fine style to the foot of the next slope.

Then Arabs were harnessed, and, to make fair play, an acid-tongued Chaldæan goaded them on. We could now see the glint of the river ahead, not so far as the crow flies, but a weary distance as the cart progressed along ground that grew worse and worse. Six times it stuck in a quarter mile; even the taunts of jarring creeds began to lose their effectiveness, and during an hour's rest that ensued the workers became friends all round over the decision that it was an impious and impossible undertaking. In a word, they struck. We said we would discuss matters after they had eaten and rested, and we went back to the Tel and beguiled our own rest and lunch with plans to raise sectarian strife and ride the ensuing whirlwind to our profit.

When the heat was over the men, rested, changed their minds by the time we reappeared. For two hours hauling and levering went on with cheerfulness, but when the small progress was compared with the sweat that had bought it hearts failed again. The river rippled but a mile off; unfortunately the road to it rippled likewise, and was soft in spots. We began to put our plots into practice. A mixed team, Arab and Chaldæan, failed, for the men began a free fight, instead of spurring one another on. Another strike ensued. The overseers were deputed to inform us that the cart

was bewitched; somebody present must have the Evil Eye.

We told them to use the proper divination to find the offender. To the joy of every one, Piers, who had been urging on the work with unseemly energy, was pitched on, and driven hence (by consent) with a formal stoning. He retired to a knoll, and pretended he did not care, but the vehicle refused to budge. I volunteered to try my hand at divination to discover if any one else had the Eye. It fined down to Evelyn, and, as no one else dared to lift a hand, I packed her off to join Piers, with a handful of gravel for benison.

The cart was dragged out of the hole and on for half a mile; then it once more came to a standstill, and the inevitable deputation presented itself. Driving off the ill-luck was not enough, said the deputation: positive good luck must be imparted to the dog-fathered vehicle. It was known that the footsteps of the Kizil Khatoun were fortunate. . . .

I anticipated the request by turning over Arjamand to a groom and mounting the cart. Perched on the Cherub's ear, with my boots dangling over his nose, I urged on the haulers by the new plan of softly chanted old Arab songs and heartening impromptus. The sun was setting now, the air cooling, a breeze met our heated faces as the erection moved forward towards the red-denied West.

We were nicely within sight of the Jebour encampment where we meant to leave the marble under guard for the night when the worst stoppage took place. I would have surrendered my post, but the men called to me, begging me not to move. With the goal in sight they were on their mettle now; they consulted, and announced their decision.

The Red Khatoun had brought great good-fortune—Mas'allah!—but, as two had been detected with the

Eye, it seemed evident that two luck-bringers were needed. Would the Effendi from Yenghi Dunia mount likewise? By Kizil Khatoun's permission.

It would have been the height of conspicuousness to make objections. I said I welcomed anything to further the work. Mr. Wilbur had the sense, furthermore, to climb up and seat himself on the cherub's horned diadem in a matter-of-course way. And, by the perversity of fate, immediately the heartened workers humped their shoulders to the hawsers the cart loosened itself and glided on at the best pace it had yet attained.

So we rode forward, the two of us, lifted high above everything, the sunset gilding us, old Nergal's face smiling, inscrutably genial, behind our dangling feet. In front the men shouldered together in a solid mass, the crowd around yelled deafeningly, the Tigris came nearer and nearer beyond the dark silhouette of the Jebour village and the reed-margin of the bank, the world around was gloriously amber to the very horizon. It was like a triumphal procession—only there was usually but one triumphator.

The American spoke in an undertone, a tone vibrant with good-humoured laughter. "*Ave!*" he said, "*Ave, Miss Haroun Al-Raschid—Triumphatora!*"

He had no business to read my thoughts. "Is this my triumph?" I demanded.

"Who secured the Tel?" he replied. "*Ave, Triumphatora!* And you'll excuse the slave who fulfils his duty of whispering in your ear that you are but mortal. It's the formula."

"An American a slave?" I demanded feebly.

"Well, Miss Haroun," he returned slowly, "it looks rather as though I were your slave, doesn't it? Otherwise, what am I doing up here? I'm your slave."

"*Pro tem,*" I replied.

"Oh, you know, Miss Haroun, there's no such thing as time. We are living in eternity."

"What are those people doing?" I asked sharply.

From the north, and parallel with the river, a caravan was coming, the figures not too clear against the sunset, their long shadows rippling beside them. It consisted of a long string of big mules, heavily laden, the last ten coming far behind the others. At the head rode a bunch of figures. Just too far off for me to distinguish any one distinctly all halted, the ten last mules still at a respectful distance from the others, and a rider spurred forward. I could distinguish him for a splendidly mounted cavalier, the lounge of his Kurdish turban flying.

On the flank of our crowd, Papa, Piers, Evelyn, and the greater chieftains were riding. To these the cavalier made his way, drawing up with a flourish to greet, not my father, but Evelyn. This was astonishing enough; it was bigger wonder when Evelyn, after turning to Papa and making an introductory gesture, galloped across country to the waiting group.

Here the cart rolled amongst the outer huts of the encampment and I could see no more. It slowly proceeded to the cleared space where the Cherub was to be disembarked, and came to a final halt amidst wild cheering. We had no chance to dismount when between the huts Evelyn made an appearance, her ugly mount flanked by a superb white pacing mule. The mule was caparisoned with velvet and silver trappings, and ridden by a closely veiled woman.

"Rathia, isn't it too jolly to believe?" cried Evelyn blithely, as they reined up beside us. "Can you guess?"

I was bending down to the veiled figure. It needed neither sight nor hearing nor guesswork to recognise the Khanoum Effen' of Kalmaru.

Papa rode up with Ischaryar Beg before we could

exchange more than a few words. I made the introduction from my perch on the Cherub's face. Ischaryar sidled up, grinning happily, while my father made a graceful little speech, thanking the Khanoum Effen' for her care of us at Kalmaru, and touching rapturously on the matter of the Hittite relics. The Lady of Kalmaru displayed a gracious shyness, only inclining her veiled head with grave dignity, and speaking a few depreciating words in a voice muffled by the veil. That done, she edged the mule nearer me as I sat on Nergal. Mr. Wilbur had slipped away before the crowd closed in and prevented my descent.

"Salam done, we will proceed on our way, Jerning-ham Khanoum," she said.

Evelyn came in first with a cry of dismay. "We are bound for Samarra, and we camp to-night, Allah willing, at Maadri," the Kurd proceeded, naming a village some miles down-stream.

"You would insult us?" I exclaimed. "Our encampment is but half an hour's ride away. We flattered ourselves you had come to stay with us a while."

"We hoped, it is true, that Allah Al Wahhab would permit us to set eye on you for a few heart-beats; but we are bound for Kerbela."

She explained in a few words. It was the tribal custom at Kalmaru once a year to disinter the bodies of those who had died in the past twelve months and to convey them for final burial to holy Kerbela, near the bones of Imaum Hosain. This explained the heavily laden mules. The Khanoum Effen' had come on this yearly pilgrimage often enough, now she was bound there again, while Lailah Khanoum stayed at home with her sons to keep the Gadarwands in awe. As to Esma—this in answer to Evelyn's inquiries—she had married a neighbouring Beg some months before. By the time she had done Papa rode up.

With him came Ischaryar, the score of marksmen who were his escort, and the veiled personage, perched sack-like on a mule, that stood for the Khanoum Effen's travelling handmaid. All set eager gaze on the Lady of Kalmaru while Papa addressed me.

"The Beg Effen' tells me the Khanoum Effen', his grandmother, is in haste; but I hope, Rathia, you can persuade her to linger a little with us. If you fail——"

He tailed, for the Khanoum Effen's benefit, into one of his best speeches: to the effect that our lives would be shortened by grief if the party would not stay a while with us. She hesitated.

"It is the inconvenience of our following to you, Effen'," she said at last, in a shy voice smothered by her veil, indicating the mules in the distance.

Papa waved his hands. The precious loads should be stored and guarded as the apples of our collective eyes. It was a joy to afford hospitality to any one from Kalmaru, alive or dead. Thereupon she gently inclined her veiled head, and all was settled. Mr. Wilbur rode up leading Arjamand, and was introduced before I mounted, and so we rode back to the Tel, our shadows flitting, long and violet, over the burnt grass. The whole plain was full of people, swarming home now that the tamasha was over; Miksi and a few overseers were left to guard the Cherub, the rest of the multitude trooped back with us.

I rode at the head of the cortège with Evelyn and our chief guest, the Beg and his glittering train of hangdogs followed, with Papa and Mr. Wilbur. At a respectful distance came the charnel mules and their drivers. The Beg's servants had ridden on with the baggage, with Piers to show them a suitable spot for pitching the tents. The Khanoum Effen' talked to us in an undertone; rather, she drew us out all the way, keeping us so

engaged that the men did not venture to interrupt. We rode slowly, and by the time the Tel was towering, ragged and sunlit, over our heads, the Beg's servants had pitched camp, two big tents and a circle of smaller ones, at the lower slope below the trees.

So ends the Carting of the Cherub.

Chapter VI

A STANDING OFFER

SULTI was politely unenthusiastic, wishing audibly that Kurds would keep their old bones and old grandmothers at home, and not litter up other people's mounds with them. I made a bold reply on behalf of the Khanoum Effen's comparative youth and many attractions. Sulti listened with a grim expression. "Since you can talk like a poet about another woman, Rathia Khatoun," said she, "I would like to hear you talk of a man you loved."

All the same, she made an excuse to go over to the other camp, and justified me by subsequently spending the bulk of her time in gossip there. The Khanoum Effen', for a Kurd, was prudish; she kept severely to herself, letting it be known that she had no use for Feringhi men, although she highly approved Feringhi women. To adjust matters, Ischaryar spent most of his time with our men, and Evelyn and I practically lived in the other camp.

We all went through the diggings that evening, by moonlight. The Khanoum Effen' elected to appear in a yashmak of Puritan cut, imperial and unapproachable, signified her pleasure that I should attend and explain all in my flawless Zaza, and altogether snubbed Papa and Mr. Wilbur so politely that they let us head the party in dual dignity while they devoted themselves to the more grateful task of trying to persuade Ischaryar

that they had some method in their bone and stone digging madness.

It was a delightful variant in life for us, and the Tel would not have afforded a happier period—if only it had happened some days before!

Then I would have accepted the coming of the Lady of Kalmaru as a happy accident; as matters stood it added to my perplexities. You never believe too much in coincidence in the East; either it is intrigue or Allah's arranging. And here was the Khanoum Effen', Halet Bey's patroness, Lady of Kalmaru, on the Tel while I was having my time to decide! The Beg's party was to go on its way on Thursday. They were no more in love with haste and hurry than other Orientals, but they wished to be in Kerbela on Ashura Day. And I had until Wednesday evening to decide on my answer to the Bey.

For two nights and the day between the problem was ever at the back of my mind. Since the Bey knew of my persuading Ischaryar, how did he get the knowledge? Only two people could have told him. Ischaryar it could not be. The Khanoum Effen'? But for the warning of my vain suspicions of her over the passports I would have put her down as the arch-enemy behind it all, at once. As it was, the problem was as insoluble as that of my decision. What could it mean—this gathering of all concerned in my escapades in Kurdistan? The Bey had come on purpose, but what of the Khanoum Effen'?

At times a vague horror gripped me. Something was menacing us. Something more to be feared than revelations about the Gadarwand raid. It might be I was overwrought, or it might be instinct, or it might be a second-sight revelation; whatever it was, dread absolutely beyond expression came over me at times. The unknown is more frightening than the known can ever

be, and this unknown factor appalled me. What was the purpose that lay behind the Khanoum Effen's visit? Was there some devilry hidden in the keen brain of the lady whose sweet and gracious presence pervaded life for us now? She was a woman of mystery at best, and what depths there are in an Eastern woman's mind, both for good or evil, only that woman herself can plumb, and that only when the call for action comes.

And, to add the last straw to my mental burden, these suspicions only seemed to hold water when I was away from the object of them. Whenever I was with the Lady of Kalmaru I laughed at them to myself, and believed that her coming was no more than a pleasant accident. And when I was away again they would come back.

So Wednesday morning found me with no solution of any problem ready, and the Bey coming that evening.

It promised to be a fiery day, a day of unstirring air, hush, and oppression. It was the kind of day on which one cannot think, and after a nearly sleepless night my tormented brain rebelled; the double task of threshing out the problems and keeping up an ordinary manner outwardly was too much for it. I could feel it crawl and turn in my skull when I tried to think at all, and, as I knew too well what a last little overstrain will do for the strongest mind in an Eastern summer, I had to draw the rein with all my spiritual might. Put off is not done with, but I put off reflection until the evening, and forced myself to take a rest from thought as well as I could.

To help me there was a little excursion afoot that morning. We were to ride in the coolness, every one of us, the Kurds included, to the Jebour settlement. The Cherub had been built into a great wooden case

and embarked on a raft, and Piers was to steer it to Basrah with Miksi as second in command. So we rode down to see him off. It was approaching noon when we returned, and we all confessedly had no strength for anything but to get to some shade and hide from the hot brazen heaven and the earth that gave out the heat it had stored through the past months. It almost deprived me of my mental troubles for the time; only, when we had all crawled to our particular lairs Sulti brought the news that galvanised my outraged brain to the extent of cold chills. Halet Bey had come back from Kirkuk during our absence.

For an Oriental to be late is a matter of course; for one to be before time was correspondingly outrageous. Sulti's further report, that he had paid his respects to Papa, and, under Ischaryar's chaperonage, to the Khanoum Effen', and had then hastened, like every one else, in search of shade, did not even reassure me. What had brought him before his time?

I thought it out finally throughout that hot midday, in the oppressive hush that brooded under the un pitying blue heaven while all the Tel, and all the plain from the heat-hazed Jebel Hamrin to the hot glint of river, quivered to the dazed eye, and the workers left the untenable trenches for such threads of shade as they could find, and the dogs and horses lay flat, too exhausted to interfere with the flies that rioted on them. And quite unexpectedly, in the curious way in which an obvious inevitability will come, belated, to one's consciousness, the only course opened before my mental eye. There is much to be learnt from Alexander's way with the Gordian Knot. Instead of puzzling further, instead of trying to find out if her sweet, elder-womanly ways masked any purpose, I would put all bluntly to the Khanoum Effen'. At the worst it would be simply taking the buttons off the foils, and

with the decision a strange calm and restfulness came to me.

As soon as the sun had dipped and it was possible to stir I set out for the encampment. The Tel was waking up, slowly, to the business of getting tea ready, the animals were taking it out of the flies, viciously, the workers were crawling workwards, unwillingly.

Outside the enclosure Mr. Wilbur, armed with his camera, encountered me. "I wish to take a snap of the encampment from the Ziggurat, Miss Jerningham," he said; "will you come and help? It's an excuse," he added, in a lower tone; "the Ziggurat top is the place for confidences, and I wish to speak to you."

The last few days had been so bewildering that even this unusual request on his part failed to surprise me at first. "If you are not pressingly engaged," he added. "It concerns Halet Bey."

He looked in my eyes as he spoke the name. I wondered if this was a fresh complication, or a way of help, as I silently nodded and turned to accompany him up the slope.

"Well?" I demanded, settling myself on the bank. He stood for a minute or two, silently fidgeting with the camera, then sat on the stone before me and eyed me steadily, the least wrinkle between his brows.

"Halet Bey has made a communication to me," he began steadily, "concerning the Diz of Kalmaru."

He hesitated a second before the last few words, as though to emphasise them. His eye caught my regard and held it. It dawned on me that the woodenness of his expression and the dryness of his announcement were overdone. He was playing a part.

"Diz Kalmaru?" I repeated.

"Halet Bey told me the truth about—about it."

"Then you know as much as I do," I replied.

"Apparently."

"But why?" I exclaimed, glad he had struck the keynote of bald frankness.

"The Bey told me because he has got it into his head that I have—have some influence with you. And he knew I was at the abortive raid at Sliwa Klissia. He has told me, cynically, why he knew the guns were there, and that he is sure you disposed of them in some way. Now, meeting me here as—as your father's assistant, he is sure we were in league in Kurdistan. He is not sure if I know what you did with the arms, but thinks I might induce you to reveal it, in order to avert the scandal that will result if he circulates the truth about—Diz Kalmaru."

"Mr. Wilbur, are you aware that if those guns are found the result will be a general persecution of the Chaldæans?"

"I know."

"And do you ask me to reveal the secret? Do you expect me to betray my fellow Christians?"

"No, but I thought that if you told me we might take counsel together. Two heads, you know."

Our eyes met and remained at gaze. "You wish to take the responsibility of deciding on your shoulders, Mr. Wilbur," I said. "Don't deny it."

"I won't deny it, Miss Jerningham. I will only say you have a gift for reading my thoughts."

"You could not help, except by betraying the Chaldæans," I answered. "It is a complete deadlock. Do you think he can really injure us by publishing this scandal?"

He stared a little. "He can make out it was all pre-arranged, Miss Jerningham—Kalmaru, I mean, you know—and that your father knew about it. The presence here of those—those people from the Diz, lends colour to it. Of course I know your father had nothing to do with it; it was all your affair."

"It is my affair," I replied, "and—much as I appreciate the kindness that prompts you to offer your help—I am solely responsible, and I will remain so."

"If you would tell me, Miss Jerningham——"

"I prefer to shoulder my own responsibilities, even if I had the right to burden you with them——"

"You could have the right." His tone became abruptly forceful. "You might give me, in a sentence, the right to shoulder all your troubles, Miss Jerningham. Rathia"—he bent over to me—"will you give me the right now?"

There was a smoulder in his eyes, and his face was set, not hard now, but with a suggestion of yearning in the strong, lean lines of it. In the few words of his last speech the man had laid his soul before me, and it was a soul worth seeing and knowing and owning. I could not trifle, or affect ignorance—it would have been vulgar before the simplicity of his self-revelation. I had to be as open.

"You ask me to marry you," I said. "After—after Sliwa Klissia! You do not know what happened there, yet you offer me your name."

"I do not know what happened there," he replied, "but I know you now, Rathia. And I say: 'Give me from this moment the right to face your enemies for you.'"

"Even if I could betray my fellow-Christians, Mr. Wilbur, I have given my word of honour not to do so. Does your offer hold after I have told you this?"

"It will always hold."

"If you were connected with us the scandal will reflect on you."

"I will be able to share the bearing of it with you."

I shook my head, and I felt the tears in my eyes. "I will drag no one unnecessarily into the public scorn and execration that will be my portion if the story of

Kalmaru comes out," I replied. "Though, indeed, Mr. Wilbur, I appreciate your generosity, and will always respect you for your trust."

He nodded likewise, looking down at me, as he rose. "That is what I expected, Miss Jerningham," he said quietly. "I did not expect to win so easily. Yet I will win yet!" His voice became tense, with a curious triumphant ring in it. "I'll win yet, Miss Haroun! You would let me share your undeserved shame if you liked me well enough. No, don't speak for a moment. You do not like me sufficiently yet; how could you? Our acquaintance has been a farce for my manhood, always I have been set in a mean light before you. No, don't try to deny it. You are a true woman, Miss Haroun, and you will never yield to a man who cannot prove he can do something you cannot. And it will be hard for any mortal to do anything you cannot do better. No, one word more. I'm going to do it. I'm in no great haste, for God would never be so cruel as to let me meet the one woman in Earth and Time who is my woman, and then not let me earn her. You hear, Miss Haroun? I'll earn you yet."

He spoke with such suppressed, yet orderly passion that I had no reply to make. Then, coolly resuming his business-like tone, he went on: "With regard to the Bey's threats, after all I am not skilled in the ways of the land, and would be a poor adviser. You have kept all things to yourself so far, I know without asking. Yet there may be some one with wit and knowledge enough to find the way out."

"I know," I replied eagerly, "I am going to confide in——"

I hesitated, lest he should demur at my trusting the Khanoum Effen'.

"—the Lady of Kalmaru?" he completed. "Yes, Miss Haroun, and by evening we will know what will be."

Chapter VII

HER LORDSHIP

AFTER that encounter with Harvey Wilbur I could not take up the thread of business at once. I stayed on the Ziggurat top after he had left me until I was composed enough to go in search of the Khanoum Effen'. At her tent a fresh delay awaited, for Evelyn was there, and it was some time before I could get rid of her.

And then, alone with the Lady of Kalmaru, I did not know how to begin. There was a sense of tenseness about. From sensitiveness over her disfigurement my companion always went more or less veiled, and, although we were in strict privacy, between the folds of silk and the dangling gold I could see little more than a suggestion of the lower half of her face. Still, little as I could see, I knew she was not at ease.

"Rathia Khanoum, something is amiss with you," she said abruptly.

"Nor are you at ease, Khanoum Effen'," I replied, somewhat at a loss still.

"I know what ails myself. But what of you, child?"

She leant forward, laying one slim hand on my knee. "Is it Halet Bey?" she asked.

"What do you know of Halet Bey?" I blurted, startled.

"A great deal. For one thing, that he has come early here."

"That troubles me," I acknowledged.

"So. He came in haste that he might have the pleasure of greeting us before we depart to-morrow," she went on. "So he said, before Ischaryar."

"Khanoum Effen'," I said, "you know Halet Bey well?"

"Verily. He guided me to Kalmaru. You know—? And I know his wife likewise. She was the daughter of our nearest neighbour, as neighbours go in Kalmaru district; and, by Allah, it was a black day for her when she married!"

"What is the character of Halet?" I demanded anxiously.

"It is evil to speak ill of a True Believer." She spoke primly; I could detect the sneer in her tone. "He is a good man, Halet, when it pays him to be good. But mostly he is good to Halet Bey. And to do good to Halet Bey he would burn his own mother." She rose to her feet suddenly. "Can you see my sebleh anywhere, child?" she asked, peering about.

I picked it up from a pile of cushions. "Here it is, Khanoum Effen'. But what——"

"You are to guide me to the room in the trenches where the tablets are," she replied, adjusting the cloak. "A little evening stroll for the two of us, as the men have now left work. As a matter of fact, I was going to send for you when you came."

"But, Khanoum Effen', we were speaking——"

"We will speak in the Tablet Chamber; it is more private even than here, for no eavesdropper can approach on the desolate Tel without my hearing."

She took my arm, and, almost without my own conscious volition, I found myself leading her to the Temple Mound.

On the way she did not speak, and I did not try to speak. There was something behind all this, and her

contention as to the suitability of the trenches for private converse was true. We had the empty tunnels and cuttings to ourselves as I led her to the tablet room.

This was the Temple Library, one of the few rooms we had thought it advisable to clear out fully. It was situated towards the east side of the mound, and was open on to the little track above the bitumen pits. It was stuffy, but fairly lit, a good place for secret conferences. By the walls were masses of clay tablets too melted and scorched and stuck together by the rains of five-and-twenty centuries to be deciphered.

The Khanoum Effen' leant against the jamb of the entrance, looking over the evening scene she could not see. "It is Halet's arrangement, Rathia Khanoum," she remarked. "It would not do for him to stay too long at my tent, since I am so distant with the other men of the Tel. So we arranged to meet after Sunset Prayer, here, as it were by accident. He has a taste for intrigue, Halet."

"You arranged?" I repeated.

"Yes, child. I arranged to bring you with me. Why, I know not, but he so requested." She turned to me and her voice shook. "Now, Rathia, child, tell me, what is between you and Halet Bey?"

"It is about the gun search at Sliwa Klissia last autumn," I replied. "You have heard of it?"

"Verily. It was talk of the district, and for something in connection with it Halet left Bitfa. What has it to do with you?"

I told her, briefly, of the Bey's suspicions of my presence at the village. It needed little explanation. At the end she sighed as though deeply relieved. "A mere matter of hidden arms," she said. "Alhamdu 'lillah! So it is nothing worse. I perceive you know of the disappearance."

"But, Khanoum Effen', if I reveal it, it will make a general persecution of the Chaldæans of that district at least."

"Even so," her voice changed. "And Allah alone knows where it would stop, once the Moslem *canaille* fancied they had a clear case for fear against their Christian neighbours. It is only too evident to me that our baser sort in Turkey are ripe for some universal devilry once the signal is given. Indeed, unless the European Powers act soon, and act firmly, there may be an orgy of blood and fire that will put to the blush the atrocities of Bedr Khan Beg." She spoke in a toneless voice, like a prophet who prophesies from real, bitter knowledge. Giving a little toss to her head, as though shaking away thought, she resumed more briskly: "And if you will not tell—what then?"

"Indeed I do not exactly know. For one thing, I believe he knows the truth of the Gadarwand raids——"

"By Allah Al Wahhab, how can he? I have not spoken—Allah forbid! Nor will Ischaryar let any one know that the brilliant project for paying out the Gadarwands was aught but his own."

"Then I cannot tell what his threats could mean otherwise," I replied.

"Tell me those threats. In his words as far as you can," she made answer. She sat down beside me on a heap of tablets, and I told her the exact facts. She held my hand, lightly drumming with a pair of slim, henna-tipped fingers on it, and the invisible eyes behind the folds of her veil held mine. And, as I unburdened my mind, a sense of peace came, for I trusted her, and I knew that if any person could help me it was she.

"He knows nothing of the Gadarwand affair," she said at the last.

"But—but he has told Mr. Wilbur," I faltered.

"Wilbur Effen'?" her voice was very odd. "Explain that."

And I told her as much of my interview with the American as I could do without including the part that was sacred. At the conclusion she reflected silently for a minute, then said :

"It is not the raid. That Wilbur Effen' knows more than you do, child. He knows because Halet has told him."

"What has the Bey told him?" I asked, in a very agony of apprehension.

"What I must tell you——" She broke off, holding up a finger, the noise of footsteps sounded along the path. "Too late," she said; "here is the Bey himself."

The open doorway was darkened by the portly figure of the Turk. Up against the grey Eastern sky he stood in silhouette as he saluted us.

"'As Salam'," he intoned, and bowed.

"Bismillah," returned the Khanoum Effen', with a wave of one hand. She sat very upright, as though stiffened for a fray. The Turk came in, bowed again, and seated himself at the other side of the little room.

"You will pardon me, Effendim, that I requested you to take the trouble of coming hither," he said suavely. "I thought it well that Wilbur Effen' might be able to join our conference."

"Wilbur Effen'!" I repeated.

"He will join us in a few minutes, I do not doubt." The Bey's tone was an absolute purr. "It was well all concerned in this grave matter should assist at the conclave—Allah willing. Also I thought he might have influence with you, Jerningham Effen'——"

"I fail to see what Mr. Wilbur has to do with the affair of Sliwa Klissia," I objected hotly. The light was on one side of the Turk's face, greenish evening

light, and the features looked unwholesome in it, unwholesome and menacing.

"He met you near Sliwa Klissia," he rejoined. "At least, he was there soon before you rejoined your father."

"It was an accident," I retorted.

"A clever accident. Such a clever accident as that which brought the Khanoum Effen' here," he rejoined suavely.

Before I could reply the doorway was blocked again by a leaner figure this time. Harvey Wilbur did not come in. He stood by the side of the entrance. In that position I could see the green light on the side of his face too, but it did not look unwholesome, only keen, and clean, and sharp-cut.

"Have I your permission to remain, Effen'?" he addressed the Lady of Kalmaru as he swept off his hat.

"With pleasure, Effen'. Will you not be seated?"

"By your grace I will stand here. If by any chance any one passes it will not be possible then to see within. Well, Bey Effen'?"

"The business is simple," said the Bey. "Whether you know what became of the arms at Sliwa Klissia is uncertain, but Jerningham Effen' knows, and I doubt not the Khanoum Effen' knows, and in any case I have no doubt both of you will join in persuading Jerningham Effen' to tell the plain truth and escape what will otherwise be."

"You talk in riddles," I replied. "What, further, of the copy of incriminating extracts from my sister's diary?"

"I will produce it, Effen'." He fumbled in his tunic, and, as he unfolded a sheet of paper, went on. "Wilbur Effen', if you know the truth, you will doubtless confess it, lest shame fall on Jerningham Effen', for whom I know you have great regard——"

"Bey Effen'," Mr. Wilbur's tone was a little im-

patient. "As Sir Horne Jerningham's assistant I have the welfare of all his family at heart. But I do not know anything about those arms."

The Bey shrugged his shoulders, and handed over the sheet. On it, in his own neat script, for he was a good scholar in his way, I read this :

"October 15. Diz Kalmaru.—The Khanoum Effen' and Rathia are awfully friendly, they might have been friends for years. I never knew R. get on so quickly with any one before. I thought it odd she was so bent on turning aside to Kalmaru, but now I understand she knew what she was after——

October 16.—Left Kalmaru by secret way, but must not speak of that. It is remarkable how friendly Rathia is with the Khanoum Effen'; the K. E. conducted us, talking with R. all the way. She seemed cut up at parting with us, at least with R. It was easy to see she did not take much notice of me, although she was kind and gave me a most splendid turquoise ring at parting. She gave Rathia a whole bagful of ancient signets. R. was wild with delight; it must have taken the K. E. years to collect them. The K. E.'s profile is very like R.'s. I suppose it is the Kurdish angle——"

I read it aloud in a low tone. Ending, I looked up, bewildered. "What, in the name of all that is ridiculous, is this supposed to prove?" I demanded.

The Bey gave a little impatient gesture. "Why pretend further, Effen'? It tends to prove what you know, what I will spread abroad convincingly if you do not tell of the guns. That——"

The Khanoum Effen' checked him with a gesture. Bending to me she said, "I will say it." Her voice was tense, in almost a whisper she concluded: "It is what you do not know yet, Rathia. That I am the Khan Rathia of Amadiyeh. Your mother."

Chapter VIII

THE TRUTH

WAS it strange?—the announcement did not astonish me so much as it should have done. Rather, my mind began quietly to piece together a hundred past little incidents that were explained by it. There was a spell of silence. Harvey Wilbur leant forward.

“Miss Jerningham, didn’t you know?” he asked incredulously.

“My mother died twenty years ago,” I said quietly, my eyes fixed on the veiled face of the Khanoum Effen’. She sat, bent forward, as though frozen.

“Y’Allah!” said the Bey. “You would lie to the Questioning Angels in your grave, Jerningham Effen’.”

Harvey bent further towards the other man. “Bey Effen’, only the knowledge that it would make matters worse enables me to refrain from laying my hands on you,” he said.

“As you will, Effen’,” replied the Bey, and a revolver showed in his hand. The Khanoum Effen’ stretched a hand between them.

“Peace!” she said, in a tone of weary anger. “You would indeed make bad worse by violence, Wilbur Effen’. Rathia, have you heard how many saw your mother’s body?”

I shook my head.

“Only one person,” she said, “and that was Sulti,

the same Sulti who brought me to the Tel when she suspected something was behind the Bey's coming."

"Sulti!" I echoed, and many things became clear in a flash.

"Sulti, who has been my link with you throughout life," she replied. "Rathia"—and her voice became too low for any but myself to hear it—"I believe you felt it all through, from Kalmaru onwards."

There was yearning infinite in her tone. "Rathia, Rathia, my child, say you felt something about me—something. Even if it's untrue say it!" she begged.

"I will say it, and it is no lie," I replied. "Yes," I seemed to come out of a momentary vision, with all put right in my mental view, "Yes, everything is explained now." I lifted her hand and kissed it. "How you happened to become what you are now I do not know, but I need no more proofs than that my heart and past happenings afford to believe you are my mother."

The Bey's voice roused us. "Why this pretence, Effen'?" he demanded. "You have known this long enough——"

"You lie, Effen'," replied my mother. "This secret was between you and me until you forced me to reveal it."

He sneered. "You forget, your daughter understood when I spoke of the awkwardness of my revealing something connected with Kalmaru."

"She thought it was something else." It was my mother's turn to sneer. "Something else that you do not know, Bey Effen'. We have secrets even you do not know."

"I know enough for my purpose," he retorted, and, turning to me: "You have acknowledged it, Effen'; here is your mother—and the only lawful wife your father has had, according to the law of Europe."

Nobody spoke as he paused, and he went on : " What of the other woman, the great English lady he married ? She was no wife. What of the young sister you love and the young brothers whose names are so often on your lips ? They have no right—by the curious laws of the Feringhis—to their father's name. That is what I will circulate abroad if I choose."

I sat up with a start as this aspect of the case was put before me. The enigma of his threats was solved. " You boast foolishly," I faltered. " You could circulate scandal, but how would that hurt us ? "

" Because your father would have to trace down that scandal, and when he traced it to me I would prove it. I who led Rathia Khan to Kalmaru."

" But, Bey Effen', you cannot set out to circulate a scandal, like a spiteful gossip," Mr. Wilbur put in.

" Wilbur Effen', I do not propose to do so. It will do no harm to explain. There is a priest at Tekrit who is my spiritual guide. In moments of spiritual distress or dilemma I resort to him. Now, in my youth I did wrong, leading the Khan Rathia, a wedded woman, away with one who was not her husband. But I was young and tempted by her offers of coin, also I thought it was not so ill that I should assist to draw a Moslemah away from her sinful connection with a Christian man——"

" Khanoum Effen'," Mr. Wilbur interrupted. " Why must I stand listening to this hound ? Why cannot I kill him and be done with it ? "

" Because you do not know how many others have the secret to publish abroad if anything happens to me," the Bey answered.

" Yes, Wilbur Effen'," my mother added. " It is so. Violence will not answer."

" So I did," the Bey resumed. " The old scandal

died in my mind. Until the Khan Rathia came shamelessly to rejoin her old Christian lover——”

I jumped up with a cry. My mother pulled me down. “We three know it is a lie, but have patience,” she exhorted. “The Bey is setting forth what his Mollah at Tekrit will believe.”

“Even so,” the Bey bowed. “And he is a zealous Moslem, my spiritual guide. What he will do—I cannot say in a word. It may be that the zealots of Tekrit and round about will come to Abou Khatoun to deal with your father as they think fit. It may be you will all escape with your lives. I trust so, for the noise of the affair will spread the cause of it sufficiently. I have spoken.”

“It is truth,” my mother confirmed. “A new generation has arisen since my marrying your father was an open secret; and a worse. Your father is respected, but when the Mollahs raise the cry of ‘Allah hath given!’ only Allah and Eblis can tell what the outcome will be.”

There was a little silence, and I saw it all. The riot, possible death, the inquiry, the Mollahs spreading our tale, backed by the Bey’s name and evidence. The scandal that could not be stopped. And, after all, what did it matter so much what happened to us outwardly, when my father, and Evelyn, and the boys, would know the hideous truth of their relationship? My world had come down in pieces, and I was helpless.

“A dark picture, Effen’,” the Bey’s voice broke in on my confused meditations. “Look at the alternative. Ten sentences, to tell the truth of Sliwa Klissia. A signed statement. All is done, my lips are sealed, I am restored to favour, I am your good friend.”

His tone was absolutely coaxing. My mother remained quietly holding my hand, her head bowed. Mr. Wilbur’s eyes were fixed on me frankly.

"I promised not to reveal the secret," I said, and it was as though I spoke without my own will. I looked at the Bey, but with the side of my vision I saw approval snap from the eyes of the American.

My mother spread her hands. "God have mercy on us!" she said. "Mine is the guilt. My heart wishes you had chosen otherwise, my daughter, but my soul knows you are right." She stood up. "Before Allah Almighty mine is the guilt! But for me none of this would have come to pass, and at the Resurrection of the Damned I will pay for all. It is just; Allah is the Aware. I murmur not, but why must the innocent suffer? Would I could die, and die in torment, to keep the punishment on my own head!"

"Mother! Do not say such things!" I begged.

"It is sweet to hear you say it, my Rathia. It is a sweeter joy than ever I deserve. Yet I speak the truth, and I pray Allah the Generous, Z'ul Jalali wa'l Ikram, that He will yet divert the punishment on my head and let the guiltless escape. As He can do, Bey Effen', at the last moment, if He will."

The Bey shrugged his shoulders. "Effen', I would far rather hear of those guns than cause distress to any one on this Tel. By 'l Aziz, I speak truth."

He rose in turn. "Effen'"—he spoke to me—"I am not hard, and I desire to mend my fortunes, not to distress you. You are firm now, I perceive; but in a little while better counsel may come. Until I come to bid ye all a fair night, as is the custom, I give you a space for reflection. Remember, you can do nothing to stop me. Tell your father if you will." He laughed aloud. "You are in my hand, and it will take but a few hours to do what I have hinted, once the Mollah at Tekrit hears my story. Until the night, 'As Salam.'"

He bowed himself out, and strode away along the track. Harvey Wilbur stood upright, silhouetted

against the darkening sky. "So there is nothing for me to do but to wait?" he said bitterly. "Miss Jerningham, can I do nothing?"

"Nothing," I replied.

His eyes flashed in the dark. "There are a few hours yet. We may think of something. At least I must countermand the arrangements I made to ride to Mosul to-morrow. If only you could have told me!"

He bowed to us both, and was gone in turn.

"My sin, and others must suffer," said my mother, when we were alone. "My sin of twenty years ago, and those then unborn must suffer! Ah, Allah sends punishment more grievous than His creatures can bear!"

Her tone was neither bitter nor angry, only nor glad nor sorry nor hoping nor afraid, the tone of one past mortal comfort, or mortal emotion. I placed my hand on her mouth.

"No, no, my mother!" I begged. "He is most merciful and compassionate. It may be good for us—— But, oh, my poor sister!"

"My sin, and she suffers!" responded my companion steadily. "You have not asked of my sin, child," she laughed, and it was harsh and sadder than tears. "After all, Halet elucidated it."

"He told us something that sounded ill," I replied. "But I bear in mind that he is going to tell another tale to the Mollah in a way that will make it out more ill than it is."

"It is worth everything, save the sufferings of the innocent, to hear you defend me, Rathia," she replied, a more wholesome passion in her tone.

"Do you need defending?" I demanded, coming closer to her, and looking into the shade where her eyes were. "After the intertangled business of all these months I can believe that the truth of anything can be

the opposite of what it seems at first, particularly, my mother, when it is an evil-sounding tale about *you*."

"Ah, Allah the Aware, I do not deserve this ! Yet it is sweet !" There was a liquid break in her voice now. "Yet, before Him, Rathia, my sin was somewhat less than it appears. Shall I tell you of it, child, that you may be armed with truth when the need of it comes ?"

"Tell me, mother, if you choose. Or, if you do not choose 'so to do, leave me ignorant, and when Halet speaks I will be content to say I believe without evidence in my mother's righteousness."

"Ah, child, so might Majnoun have spoken of Lailah ! By Allah, this is sweet, though undeserved. I prefer to tell you, and you shall judge. Of how I came to Diz Kalmaru you have heard, and of my life there since. I left your father—that was my crime. And I left him for this reason : that before it two other things had left us—love, my dear, and peace of mind. I tell you the truth, my daughter, that you may judge between the two of us. And I do not doubt that your judgment will be that, to that point, both of us were innocent. Your father is innocent still ; on me the blame rests, and if the judgment could but rest on me likewise ! Child, our marrying was a mistake, a thing of hasty passion and slow repentance. Your father is a good man, a just and noble man, a man to make a woman proud and happy—provided she be of his own race. The bonds fretted, my dear, before many months were past. Yes, I knew it was a mistake, and I knew he realised it, and, by Allah, it would have been easier to bear if he had been less considerate—if he had insulted my intelligence less by trying to keep up the semblance of affection that was long dead ! This is the truth, and perhaps you will understand it."

"I think I do," I whispered.

"And when you came, my dear, he loved you as his own soul; but love for you did not revive his love for your mother. Then the case was hopeless. You were my solace, child, but you brought a new trouble. In the first days of love and the latter day of fret I had forgotten one thing, having no room in my mind for it. Now it came back. We lived on sufferance, you must understand, by leave of the way the priests winked at our history, but ever we were on the brink of disaster. A single offended Mollah would have been our doom, and for your sake alone I dreaded it. Your father did not understand it as well as I did, but I understood it but too well, and that on me alone the burden rested. It is easy for a mother to die for her child, but it is wrong to die of purpose. Besides, I could not bear to leave you."

She paused, looking, with eyes that could not see, at the darkening plain. "Then, when we were encamped out in Kurdistan, the solution came. A hostile Mollah rose and offered me a choice. He was a town Kurd, a cousin of my own, a Sharif and a Hajji. A promising combination, eh?" she laughed. "He had known us in Mosul, he visited us at the encampment, and he offered me a choice. He wanted me, my dear, that is the sordid truth. And his offer was that I should come with him, away from my Christian associates. He was a stern bigot, my cousin the Sharif; he thought I deserved punishment for what I had done, but for his own passion's sake he would spare me if I repented and forsook my ill ways. If I came with him, in short. Otherwise, he intended to raise a crusade against us—in the heart of Kurdistan, my dear! It was like Allah's own arrangement. There was Sulti to take charge of you and to keep me informed of your welfare—yes, child"—she paused to laugh, and this

time her laugh was gentle. "Through your life I have been ever in the background, watching you from my hidden nook, how closely you can never guess!"

"I can believe it," I answered, as she paused.

"You understand. This Sharif, my cousin, was bound for Trebizond. I died, as you know, and was buried, while really I was faring away with him. And we met the Gadarwands—the rest you know. Halet, the Turkish servant of the Sharif, was in the secret, and he agreed with the lie I told, for his skin's sake. And now you understand."

"You left me for my own sake. That is all, in a word," I replied.

"You are my daughter," she answered. "Even so, and I have watched over you. Allah the Aware could not have done it better! There are few cleverer women than Sulti, child, and none other to whom I would have entrusted you—and if any had used you ill Sulti would have been my proxy."

I quite shuddered. "My father's second wife——?" I hinted.

"Allah rest her!" replied my mother warmly. "Christians are People of the Book, and of them she is surely in Allah's heaven now. She played the part of a mother's sister to you—and I have played the part of worst enemy to her daughter! I would I knew of these guns at Sliwa Klissia."

She looked at me sideways. "I cannot betray the helpless, my mother," I answered.

She sighed deeply. "Then it is better you should alone be in possession of the secret. I would protect the helpless too. But there are degrees. Those Chaldæans are no affair of mine, and your little sister is, for but for my action she would never have been born. By Allah, I do not say it would be the lesser crime to betray them to save her, but—I would be tempted. I,

who, under Allah and Eblis, am the cause of all. I, who cannot even save the child by my own life! Have I deserved all this, Rathia, my daughter?"

"My mother, Allah is just," I replied. "And there is yet a little space before the blow falls."

Chapter IX

“ TO MAKE LIVE OR TO SLAY ”

WE stayed in the Tablet Chamber until the chill of closing night warned us we would be missed and sent us out on the ledge-path. The shadow of night was crawling over the sky, the plain was hidden in the nebulous dusk before the moon should rise, and there was radiated heat in all the air. From the bitumen pits deep beneath us the sound of the slow-breaking bubbles and the hiss of gas from them was very distinct, and the pitch-reek and its companion sulphur were insistent beyond the common. It was a gloomy and a suggestive scene, and it accorded with the sinister happenings that were hatching unseen behind the orderly life of the Tel.

As I guided my companion along the narrow track a figure rose up from its seat a little farther on and strode out of sight round a bend.

“The Effen’ Wilbur,” said my mother.

“Can you see so well?” I asked, surprised.

“Nay, but I know his step. Indeed, Rathia, it is one of the steps I have learnt to distinguish with most speed. He waited out of earshot to save us from interruption.”

“Probably,” I agreed.

“It is like Wilbur Effen’,” she said, peering at me, although I knew she could not distinguish my features.

“It is like him,” I agreed absently.

We returned to the encampment, and by the tombs Papa met us, and stopped us to make joking and compli-

mentary speeches about our absence. Furthermore, he informed us that, in honour to our guests before their departure next day, the diggers, who were being feasted for the same purpose, meant to indulge in an orgy of dancing and the inevitable bitumen bonfire. He was in uncommonly good spirits, the Khanoum Effen' made her usual smothered replies and her customary shy escape from prolonged conversation. And I had no mental freshness left to appreciate the grotesquerie of it.

Life had to be taken up as usual. Sulti awaited me, with a loud scolding for my lateness. When we were alone she looked at me very straightly.

"I took the Bey's message for the appointment," she said simply. "Walls have ears, my Rathia Khatoun. Particularly tent walls."

So I only replied: "Twenty years, Sulti!"

"They were good years," she responded composedly. "When a woman is capable of keeping a secret she does it well. Now thou wilt understand many things, Rathia Khatoun. As to whatever trouble that smooth liar Halet Bey has raked up, there are three women against him, when I have heard of it from the Khanoum Effen', and Allah aid the man with three women pitted against him!"

"The time is so short, Sulti."

"Please Allah, there is no such thing as Time with Him. Where He aids an hour is as a thousand years and a thousand years as an hour, and He is on our side."

And she would say no more.

I cannot say how the next hours passed, for all I remember is the eternal thought of the day's revelations and the night's decision that rode my wearied brain. Outwardly I must have kept up a fair semblance of my ordinary manner, for Papa made no more than a comment on my being a little distrait, and was quite satisfied

when he learnt that I had been sitting above the pits with our chief guest for an indiscreetly long time.

The whole Tel was noisy that night as the diggers and their families feasted and made merry round great fires where sheep roasted whole. The ravine of the pits was the selected spot, and from end to end it was dotted with cooking-fires, and so redolent of roast meat that the sulphur fumes were drowned. Only they had resumed their sway when, later, all the meat was eaten, and the sports commenced. It was then, when night had well set in, that we of the encampments went forth to view the scene. I stayed with my mother on a convenient little sheltered platform along the ledge-path from the Tablet Chamber, well away from the pits, while the others strayed about as they chose.

It was bright moonlight, a night of singular hush as far as earth and air went. The noisy ravine seemed enclosed in by walls of silence, dead and ominous, extending to the far bounds of space. The earth was still disagreeably hot to the touch; the air, for all the transparent moonlight, seemed heavy and thick. The Jebel Hamrin, a vision of sheer distance in the white light, seemed curiously chill. Down in the ravine it was like Tophet turned mannerly, for a bundle of burning brushwood was flung into each pit as soon as we had negotiated the ledge, and the flames surged up in so many fountains of fire, enveloped in smoke that writhed in mighty columns up in the still night-air. Up over the ravine top the smoke gathered and spread into a canopy, a squirming black canopy, lit redly underneath, that shut off the sky and stars and shut in the ravine, speckled with smaller fires and heaving with wild figures that pranced round the fires, and noisy with the roaring of flames, war-cries, Arab songs, and shrill melodies provided by a pack of itinerant Kurdish musicians.

Papa and his court moved about, too distant to be discerned by more than the stir that accompanied them, the Beg and his henchmen like butterflies in their silken best, hung with gold and turquoises, the Bey magnificent in splashes of gold lace, Evelyn a vision of white and gold. It was a night to be remembered by all the workers on Tel Abou Khatoun.

I suppose my mother saw and heard as little, consciously, as I did as we sat looking down on all in our dignified isolation, and spoke of what must be. There was a track from our eyrie down to the bottom of the ravine, and up and down this various members of the party drifted at intervals for a word with us. The smoke had hidden the last glimpse of stars, and a little chill was coming into the air, when Mr. Wilbur squired up a small Arab boy.

"Sitt Effen', an antikah," the child tendered a little Beltis statuette, which he had retrieved somewhere. I handed over the customary coin. He stowed it in the fold of his one garment, which was of an amplitude to make one fold. "Sitt Effen', the money is for my mother and my father," he announced. "This is for the Effen' from her slave."

He produced from behind his back a little bunch of thyme and marjoram. "Lord knows how many times he risked his neck to get it, Miss Jerningham," said Harvey Wilbur admiringly, for such fresh herbs were only to be found in the more inaccessible crevices of the Tel. The boy went off with a peacock gait, as I refrained from more than verbal thanks. Mr. Wilbur lingered.

"Well, ladies?" he asked anxiously.

"All is settled," my mother answered with composure. "My daughter will tell Sir Horne this night."

"I suppose that's the only course," he conceded gloomily. "Perhaps Sir Horne——?"

"He can do nothing," she replied to his pause. "Only it were well he were forewarned. Also he must decide whether it is better I should leave the Tel to-morrow, or make excuse to linger."

"You are right," he agreed. "But, Khanoum Effen', I find it hard to believe this is actual life, not a nightmare from which we will wake——"

"Life is but a dream from which we will awake, Wilbur Effen'."

"I know; but this seems so senseless. It is hard to believe the Bey will fulfil his threats. He will gain nothing by doing it."

"He will gain revenge for his thwarted ambitions," she replied. "As to fulfilling them, they would have had no weight if we had not known he would do so."

Before he could answer another figure came up the track, dark against the lit ravine. "I made Papa bring me here," Evelyn's voice announced. "It's stuffy down there and I want to speak to you, Rathia. Don't go, Mr. Wilbur; I'm glad you happened to be handy."

She subsided on the rug opposite me. Now her face was turned to the light it showed perplexed and a little angry. "Some one has been talking," she remarked. "It's safe with Halet Bey, of course, but I feel worried as to how far it has gone."

We all looked at her in consternation. "What has the Bey done, or said?" I asked, and I knew I went pale.

"Somebody has been talking," she proceeded, unheeding. "As far as I can make out, the four of us, and Mrs. Kent, were the only people who knew about it. Now the Bey is in it, and I do not yet know how he learnt about it. It's dangerous."

"What on earth are you talking about?" I demanded.

"Why, Halet Bey got me by myself and started to

tell me he feared all the family would get into disgrace and trouble over a certain matter connected with Kurdistan in which you, Rathia, are particularly involved. That was how he began."

She paused, looking at us all in turn. The light coming from beneath made her expression a complete enigma. I tried to speak and failed. My mother drew her veil closer. Mr. Wilbur, standing above Evelyn, looked down at her, his face set and hard.

"He went on to say it was known to you, Khanoum Effen', and to you, Mr. Wilbur," she went on. "And that if it leaks out it will bring disgrace on the family. That is what he said. He went on to say he did not know if it was known to me or to my father."

It dawned on us all. The Bey had told her the truth of the Khanoum Effen', and had sent her to us for confirmation or contradiction. And what use would contradiction be? Undoubtedly he hoped her entreaties to us to save her name and her mother's name by revealing the other secret would do what nothing else could. All this raced through my mind in the little pause before she resumed:

"I suppose he meant well, but I felt very angry at the suggestion that you could have any secret that would be disgraceful, Rathia. So I told him politely I was grateful for his warning, but I knew all about the matter he referred to, and, while it might get us into trouble, I failed to see any disgrace about it."

She paused again, frowning. "He seemed much surprised, and even looked as though he did not believe me, but before he could say anything further the Onbashi came to report there was a row at the other end of the ravine and he had to turn me over to Papa. And I thought I'd come about it at once."

The evil had been averted for a little while. The comfort of that was little enough. "What made you say

you knew about it, instead of hearing him out, child?" asked my mother. "Was it a quixotic desire not even to hear a word against your sister?"

"Why, Khanoum Effen', I do know about it of course. I don't believe in fibs, and what would have been the use of that?" The girl laughed quite cheerily. "A secret shared by you and Rathia and Mr. Wilbur could only be a certain one. And I had known about it for months. Since Christmas."

We all three remained dumb. It was past understanding. "Oh, I know," she declared, "I think I remember how many revolvers went into each of your boots, and I certainly know how clever it was of you to get the guns out of the windows into the river, and to play corpse in the coffin until the real one could be put in again. Yes, Rathia, I know it all, and I've been worshipping you more than ever in secret ever since I learnt it."

Mr. Wilbur gave a little strangled gasp that might have meant anything. She looked full at me with what could only be utter youthful admiration in her sparkling eyes.

"Of course you recognised her in the coffin, Mr. Wilbur," she added. "As to you, Khanoum Effen', I do not know how you were concerned in it, but since the Bey knew you were—well, you are."

"You are quite right, my dear, I know all about it," replied my mother gently.

There was nothing to be said. The utter bewilderment of this last complication left me speechless. Mr. Wilbur voiced the question I had no sense left to ask.

"Simply enough," replied Evelyn. "You see, Rathia, the wife of the Rayis, the lady who did up your hair in the local fashion, was in some doubt as to whether her sister had been properly interred, the service having been wasted on you. So she asked Mrs. Kent. And Mrs.

Kent, when she was in Mosul for Christmas, told me under seal of secrecy. She did not tell Papa, because it would be awkward for him to know about such a thing when he owes so much to the Sultan, but she thought some one in the family ought to know the rights of it, in case of inquiries, and I believe she has a good opinion of my discretion. And what I want to know now is : How did the Bey get hold of it, and how many other people know of it ? ”

“Heaven knows,” I recovered my voice at last. “And Heaven grant it is not known to any one who will bring persecution on the Chaldæans by revealing it.”

“I know,” she nodded, very grave now, “Mrs. Kent explained it all. And that’s why I thought it better to come straight to you.”

“You did right, child,” my mother spoke, and there was much meaning in her voice. “You may safely leave this matter to us. We are all older and more experienced than you. Indeed, you may leave all in our hands.”

“I feel a load off my mind,” said Evelyn, getting up.

“We will discuss and decide,” answered my mother.

“Then you can tell us what you are going to do later. I promised Papa I would not be long. Yes, there he is coming for me. I’ll leave all in your hands.”

“In so doing you will leave it in the appointed hands,” my mother returned. Evelyn, all Western at heart, shook away thoughts of the trouble at once. “You will find out and tell me all ? ” she said.

My mother inclined her stately head. “Yes, and directly you see Halet Bey bid him to come here at once.”

“Now I’m quite satisfied.” Evelyn turned to me. “So you see I know what a grand creature you are ! ” she whispered, and flitted away.

I sprang to my feet. Mr. Wilbur laid a checking hand on my arm.

"It is out of your hands now, Miss Jerningham," he said. "It is in mine."

"It is my problem——" I protested wildly.

"Providence has made it mine," he replied. "And it is hard. Oh God, it's hard! You—or those Chaldæans!"

"It is in the man's hands, now," said my mother quietly. "Go aside, if you will, children, and speak of it."

It was better. I did not like even her ears to hear me plead. Mr. Wilbur strode down along the ledge until he was near the fiery pit nearest to the side. He stood looking down at the writhing flames. "It's hard," he repeated.

"The road of honour is hard," I said.

He did not look at me. "The Chaldæans—or you," he muttered.

"Honour or dishonour," I interposed.

"And which is honour and which dishonour?" he asked sharply.

"To betray the innocent——" I began.

"You and your sister are innocent," he retorted.

"We are two weighed against many thousands," I replied. He turned and looked at me.

"One can outweigh many thousands sometimes," he said. He walked along the track, the fire blazing so near that it lifted the hair on my left temple as I followed him. We were almost within sight of the black mouth of the Tablet Chamber when he turned again.

"I could decide better by myself," he said harshly.

"You would seek out the Bey before you have time to think and come to a just conclusion," I answered.

He twisted round again and we faced one another, up on the ledge under the ominous black canopy with

its fiery supports, and over the mimic Tophet. Others who marked us doubtless thought we were showing one another the beauties of the scene, while we really debated the fate of thousands—fire and darkness and worse. So we looked at one another in the murkily diabolical glow of the flaming pits. A red glint was in the American's eyes, a light from inside.

“My problem,” he repeated, his face set starkly and his nostrils twitching. “My problem, and, Rathia, I love you well enough to let all the world suffer to save you.”

“Oh, Harvey!”—the name came out involuntarily—“are you not capable of loving me better than that? Can you not believe I would rather suffer than be saved at cost of others' suffering?”

“Rathia, I know that.” His forehead was beaded, and every drop was like a globe of bloody fire. “I know it, Rathia, but it is for me to decide.”

We walked back, without taking any more heed of outward things than sufficed to keep us from going over the edge. I knew what was passing in the man's mind, and kept silence. Only I hoped he would decide, and decide for the Chaldæans, soon. I had a sense, a mean, sneaking sense, at the back of my consciousness that if he hesitated longer I would give in, that I would beg him to save me and mine and let the others pay for us. I knew it, and I wanted him to save me from my worse self. Visions were rising in my mind—visions of what might happen if a Mollah set the bigots of Tekrit on us, visions, far worse in their way, of Evelyn and my father in possession of the shameful truth.

So we, not observing, reached the top of the track, and were roused by a call from above us.

“Jerningham Effen', Wilbur Effen', by your grace!”

It was Halet Bey's voice, and we looked up to behold him leaning against the bank over the sombre, veiled

figure of my mother. A complacent smile illuminated his fat features.

“ It is settled. Alhamdu’l’llah ! ” he called, and we came to our senses. We had forgottén, both of us, that there was another factor in the problem.

The Bey turned to us, his face complacently happy. “ Please Allah, Jerningham Effen’, He hath given to you a wise mother—He is the Bestower and the Beneficent ! ” he went on. “ Now all is clear, and indeed it is most amazing, and most complimentary to your wit and resource, Jerningham Effen’.”

“ Complimentary ? ” I repeated. “ Mother, have you betrayed all ? ”

She stood up, a sibylline figure, sombre draperies red-lit by the leaping pit-fires, the slim hand that held the veil together reddened so that the henna-tipped fingers seemed dipped in blood.

“ I have retrieved the wrong I began,” she replied in a toneless voice. “ And on my head alone will the judgment fall. To make live or to slay was put in my hands, my daughter, and I have dealt out life and slaying as I deemed meet. Alhamdu’l’llah ! Mine was the fault, and mine shall all the punishment be ! Praise be to Him, Zu’l Jalali wa’l Ikram ! ”

Chapter X

HOW THE PIT TOOK

"You have chosen wrongly, O my mother!" I cried. "Mother, I thought better of you! Think of what you have brought on me—to make the world believe I helped and then betrayed——"

"You have said nothing. It was taken out of your hands by Allah's will." Her voice was still toneless.

"The Bey must have proof, and only my signed confession will serve. That you forgot——"

"Your evidence is not wanted, child." Her voice became a little bitter. "Your young sister believes in the righteousness of all you do, Rathia. Can you not believe in me? You did not confess the truth. I did."

"Mother!" I began to realise.

"You helped your fellow believers," she pursued. "For that you will be well esteemed by all right-thinking folk. You confided in me, your elder, trusted friend, and I betrayed them, and your confidence. I, who am also the friend of Halet Bey. Who knows what reward the Bey is going to give me—I, whose signed confession will be his proof?"

There was a momentary silence. "Khanoum Effen'," said Harvey in a tense voice, "you are the very mother of your daughter."

She inclined her head a little. "It was on those terms alone I undertook to enlighten the Bey Effen'," she said.

"And by Allah I am glad," he assured us generally. "Believe me, that though I would have fulfilled my threats, I am rejoiced that I have been saved the infliction of trouble on you and yours, Jerningham Effen'. Truly Allah sent the excellent Khanoum Effen' here that all might be settled fairly."

There was something peculiarly repulsive about the real good-humour of the man. "We can tell the little Effen' Evelyn that there is no need to trouble further about the matter; that has been put right," he concluded.

"Right! The Chaldæans!" I exclaimed.

"It was in my hands to slay and to make live, to save and to kill," my mother replied.

"After all, what will happen is but what would have happened, by Allah's ordering, but for your interference," the Bey consoled. "We simply, by Allah's permission, eliminate the said interference, and Fate moves on its destined way."

"Kismet, and on me, the guilty, will the blame rest," my mother supplemented. "I am weary, Bey Effen', and I hear the voices of the others approach. Will you lead me back to the encampment before they are here? I am indisposed to converse with others, and I wish to have the confession you will draw out signed as soon as possible."

He bowed courteously. "Even so, Khanoum Effen'. I perceive the fires are out, and we may pass safely."

The fires had died down, each pit surface was now a blank blackness, spread with smoke alone going up lazily to join the canopy, and with little jets of gas spirting here and there.

"They are but dormant," my mother corrected, in the easy tone of one giving information. "A cinder crust has formed, and presently the men will, by way of last glory, fling in stones to break it and make a greater

blaze. I pray you, Bey Effen', call to them to hold their hands until we are safe at the Tablet Chamber."

The Bey called down to the several men who waited with stones poised, and received a promise back. My mother suddenly turned to take my hands and thrust her face near mine. "My child, my child!" she whispered. "Do not think too ill of me, for Allah's sake! It was given into my hands, and can you not trust me, although you see me give half a nation and my own soul for you?"

"I—I——" I stammered. "At least I love you still, my mother."

"Then it is a soul well lost!" She flung her arms round me, kissed me clingingly, and abruptly dragged herself away.

"The others come, Bey Effen'," she said. "Let us go first, for I must arrange the last details with you."

She touched the bank to make sure of her bearings, and, with her fingers rippling along it, moved along the track, speaking in a low tone to the Bey. The last words I caught were:

"Yea, verily, I will sleep the better to-night if I have that book destroyed."

"It is out of our hands," said Harvey, as I looked at him.

The others came up, also bent homewards, and fell in behind, laughing together. I would have joined the two in front, but my mother whispered: "Reassure your sister," and I dropped back to speak with Evelyn.

So we went along the ledge above the sinister pits, my mother and the Turk first, Harvey, Evelyn, and I a little behind, Papa and the Beg brought up the rear, laughing at their own jests.

I cannot tell how it happened. I have always avoided a clear recollection of it in my own mind. The black opening of the Tablet Chamber was in sight,

round a concave curve of the path; in the ravine the diggers waited the signal for the last grand display. The dormant pits belched up a gas flame now and then. My eyes were fixed gloomily on the pair in front. Just as they were above the largest pit a jet of flame leapt up, illuminating all for a startling moment. My mother, startled, gave a little cry, stumbled, lurched and stretched her hands, as purblind folk do when at a loss, and caught the Bey's arm. For a moment I saw the two figures sway up against the black gap of the Tablet Chamber, and was paralysed. The Bey gave a hoarse cry, something darted past me like a flash of golden light, and almost simultaneously a blinding stream of scarlet and white flame seemed to leap up and envelop the world. There were cries all round me, a scream from somewhere, and a chorus of Arab yells from a distance, mixed with the crackling of flames.

For a moment I could not see, then the fiery glare appeared to be adjusted to my sight. All had happened in a single moment; now the whole place was lit by a roaring column of fire from the big pit, raging up not ten feet to our left and billowing out black smoke. Papa and Ischaryar Beg were rushing up from behind me, Mr. Wilbur had tight hold of my arm, as though he feared I might sway over, and before us, along the ledge, were my mother and Evelyn. They stood as though petrified, plain in the light, the girl huddled on one knee against the bank, her hand grasping a protruding tree-root, her other arm clutching my mother to her.

We came up, all of us, before they moved. My mother's shoulders were hunched and her veiled head was thrown back, the attitude of one astonished past understanding.

"You have saved my life!" she almost whispered

it ; but her voice carried, hushed and insistent, through the roar of the fire and the babel from the ravine.

"Allah sent *you* to save me—*you*, Evelyn Effen'!"

And it was only then I quite realised what had broken the cinder-crust.

This is what I know, and all I choose to know. The men said, afterwards, that the Bey must have been killed by the impact on the cinders, before the fire started forth. So they said. I have never asked any one of the rights of it. Allah knows.

Chapter XI

DUSK, AND A DAY TO BE

ACCIDENTS will happen, even in a country where Allah ordains all. The chance death of a disgraced official was not likely to cause much stir. Inquiry was made by the authorities, what was once Halet Bey was buried, and so it all ended.

That evening the Kurds set forth, to march by night and shun the torrid day and so come to holy Kerbela on the anniversary of Hosain's martyrdom. We rode forth with them after the sun had dipped and left the sky a welter of gold and orange and scarlet, pierced with shafts of translucent green, to roof the bare plain, the arid hills, and the arrowy river.

The Khanoum Effen' would have my flawless Zaza for company to the last. We rode together, somewhat apart from the rest of the cavalcade, the evening breeze at our backs blowing what we said to the coffin-laden mules and their muffled drivers, far ahead. Papa and Ischaryar Beg, Evelyn and Harvey, followed some way behind, the men talking together, the girl subdued beyond her wont, both by the coming parting and the shadow of the other night's tragedy. After them tailed the baggage and servants.

It was getting near the point where we must return to the Tel. Harvey rode up and tendered a bracelet which the Khanoum Effen' had lost earlier in the day.

"Sulti stole it for me," he explained. "She favours

me, Sulti. It makes an excuse for a few words with you, Khanoum Effen'," he lowered his voice. "Khanoum, you knew all through that Halet had no accomplices."

"I knew he could have none in such a matter," she replied.

"You implied otherwise to me. But for which I would have shot him whatever the consequences. If you believe me."

"I know you speak the truth, Wilbur Effen'. It may be I thought to save you for a better part. When first I saw you I had some thought that there was a great part waiting for you to fill. One has those strange intuitions."

"Ah, when you saw me on the Cherub's head?" he returned. "A great part in Assyriology?"

"Who knows? And, remember, mine was the deed that was at the root of all this matter, and mine it was to redress; to take full guilt, and to bear the retribution. And I call you to witness, both, that it is not my own doing that I am alive this day."

"Allah had His intentions for you," replied the American.

"He caused me to be saved by Evelyn Congreve's daughter." Her voice was hushed, as though with awe.

"So Allah ordered," he agreed. "Khanoum Effen', does it not occur to you that perhaps He means you to fill another part?"

"What part can a woman, old and laden with guilt, fill?" she asked bitterly.

"The part of my mother!" I exclaimed. "It is too cruel that we cannot know one another well, now that we have met, my mother."

"I think we know one another perfectly," she replied, her tone one of joyful tenderness.

"You will come back to me," I went on. "I cannot live long without you, now I have known you."

"Please Allah, we will meet again," she replied. "Never would I have burdened you, my child, with the consciousness of deceiving your father, but since He hath ordained it, who knows but He may give us meeting again? Alhamdu'lillah! He is the All-knowing, and the Compassionate. As good friends we will meet, Inshallah, but I can never fill the part of mother to you. I gave that up, for your own good, twenty years ago."

The sadness in her tone struck a responsive chord in my heart. I could understand it all. The years of fierce abnegation, the readiness to sacrifice life and soul—for me. And I could make no return, no return at all. Almost I would have given my soul just to afford her some real proof of respect and affection, some abiding source of future pride and joy. And I could do nothing.

Harvey leant towards her a little. "Rathia Khan, Lady Jerningham, a mother's offices are needed now," he said deliberately. "Your daughter can never meet a man worthy of her, nor one more unworthy than I am, yet she cannot meet one who worships her more truly than I do. So I ask your good offices on my behalf."

As he spoke I read every thought that went to the making of that speech. My mother started and was mute.

"I am rather abrupt, very clumsy," he proceeded smoothly. "Only the shortness of the time will excuse me. Lady Jerningham, are you disposed to say a word on my behalf?"

She found her voice, and it was the voice of one who cannot believe what the ears hear. "You ask this, of me?" was all she could say.

“Of who else could I ask it? Who has such right as a mother to guide and guard her daughter’s heart? And I need your help, for once on a time I hurt your daughter’s pride so deeply that only her mother’s efforts can bridge the gulf that was opened between us. Will you speak for me, Lady Jerningham?”

How had the man learnt it—that the supreme, the most greedily prized privilege and joy of an Eastern woman is to give her daughter to a chosen man? If Harvey Wilbur had been the worst of men otherwise he should have had me and welcome to pay for the cadence of my mother’s voice as she replied:

“There is blood on my hands, Wilbur Effen’. Remember, and then do you ask me this again?”

“You forget, I know how Allah put that blood there, Lady Jerningham. And I ask your intercession.”

“Rathia, dare I speak?”

There was that in her tone now that told me twenty years of bitter repression, of fierce self-abnegation, of stoically endured heart-hunger, were paid for in that crowning, undreamed-of moment.

“You are my mother,” I said, looking past her at Harvey.

“Then, Rathia, my daughter, I had thoughts when I saw you twain lifted, enthroned, on the marble Genie. My dear, you are proud, but I can read your heart. If you did not choose to confide in me I could keep silence too, but if I may speak——”

“You are my mother,” I repeated, looking down now.

“Then, Rathia,” her voice was triumphant. “Here is the man of all men whom I have marked for you. Rathia, can I say more?”

“I will obey my mother,” I replied.

Harvey placed his hand on her bridle. I reached my own and she joined them.

“The day is dying, and may I die like it in this utter happiness!” she said.

“The spent day is past, and a new one is to start for all of us,” replied Harvey.

FINIS





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